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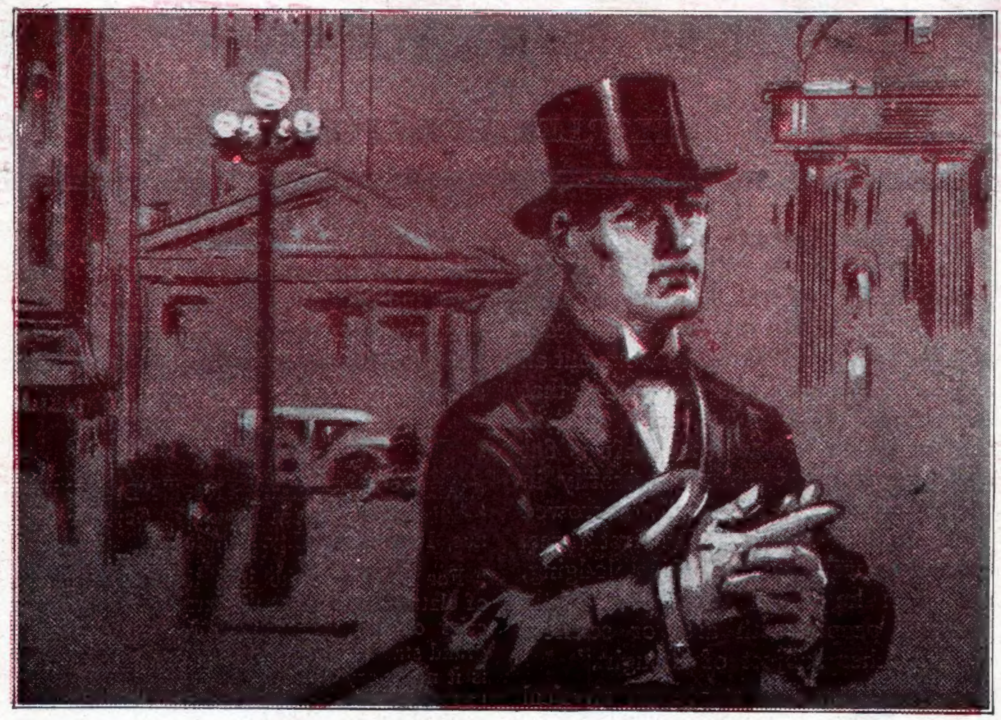

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GOOD READING

BY

CHARLES HOUSTON

JUST how alive are we? Just how much of the "good" of life do we get out of it? Ruskin, the famous English writer, asked that question years ago and set himself down to work out an answer. He made a list of things that are surely "good." I mean "good" in the sense that without them, life is flat and empty, not "good" necessarily in the moral sense. He finally narrowed down to four things. The first three, of course, were food, clothing, lodging, and then he added "good in rightly pleasing people with arts or sciences or any other subject of thought."

Without bread we starve our physical selves. Without the arts and sciences we starve what is surely as important—our thought and imagination. No matter how well housed and clad and nourished, we are not really alive if we let our imaginations die of dry rot.

Now the diet of imagination is a varied one. It is fed on paper and ink and the doings of actors on the stage and screen. In the long run, books are its staple for they are easiest to get at, and we can have them for our own at little expense. And of all forms of books, those that tell stories are the most satisfactory diet for the imagination.

Realizing the great need on the part of the American people for good fiction well told, the famous old publishing firm of Chelsea House has made it its business to distribute such fiction at low prices throughout the country. To-day the fiction that bears the imprint of Chelsea House can be found everywhere—in the heart of great cities, in remote little hamlets, through the Middle West, in the South, out on the Pacific coast.

Here follow thumbnail sketches of the most recent Chelsea House offerings, indications of the sort of story that you can expect whenever you see the Chelsea House brand on the cover of a book.

* * *

SANDOLLAR, by Charles Neville Buck. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price $2.

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* * *

RONICKY DOONE'S TREASURE, by David Manning. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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* * *

THE GREEN BAG, by John Paul Seabrooke. Published by Chelsea House, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City. Price 75 cents.

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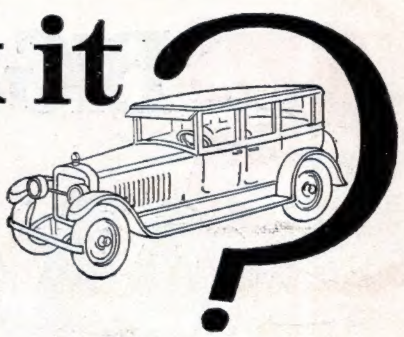

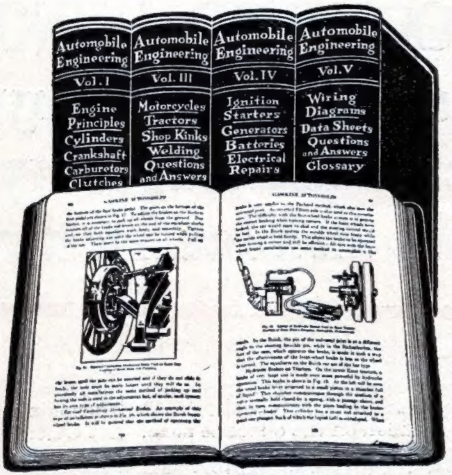

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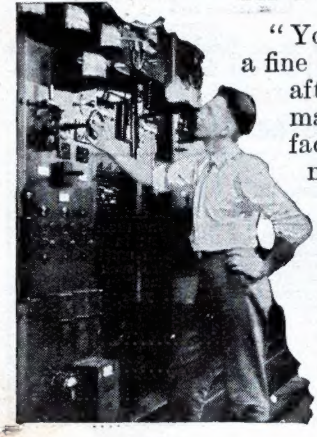

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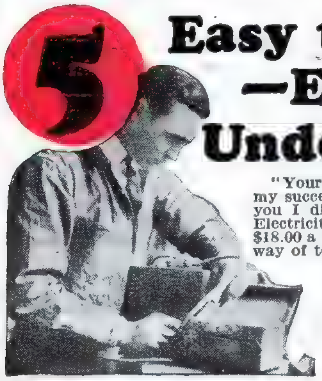

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WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything; men and women $30 to $100 weekly operating our "Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 29, East Orange, N. J.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. Every owner buys gold initials for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 170, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—NEW PLAN, makes it easy to earn $50.00 to $100.00 weekly, selling shirts direct to wearer. No capital or experience needed. Represent a real manufacturer. Write now for Free Samples, Madison Manufacturers, 564 Broadway, New York.

AGENTS—$60-$125 A WEEK. Free samples. Gold letters for stores and office windows. Metallic Letter Co., 428 N. Clark, Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN MAKING Sparkling Glass Name and number plates, Checkerboards, Signs. Big book and sample free. E. Palmer, 543 Wooster, Ohio.

MIRRORS RESILVERED AT HOME. Costs Less 5 cents per square foot; you charge 75 cents. Immense profits, plating auto parts, reflectors, tableware, stoves, refinishing metalware, etc. Outfits furnished. Write for information. Sprinkle, Plater, 333 Marion, Indiana.

$75.00 WEEKLY to Introduce "Chieftain" 3 for $4.95 Guaranteed Tailored Shirts. Full working outfit Free. Your own shirts free. Cincinnati Shirt Company, Lane 1921, Cincinnati, Ohio.

AGENTS—Every Home Needs Dress Goods, silks and general yard goods. Wonderful exclusive line. Quick sales, liberal commission. 1,000 lovely fabric samples furnished. Write to The National Importing Company, Dept. 69, 569-573 Broadway, N. Y. City.

AGENTS WANTED TO ADVERTISE our goods and distribute free samples to consumers; 90c an hour; write for full particulars. American Products Co., 9054 Monmouth, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Agents and Help Wanted—*Continued*

AGENTS: $10.75 Daily (In Advance) Spare time will do. Introduce 12 months Guaranteed Hosiery. 47 styles, 39 colors, for Men, Women, Children; including latest "Silk to the Top" Ladies' Hose. No capital or experience needed. We furnish samples. Silk hose for your own use free. New Plan. Macochee Hosiery Company, Road 4501, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Help Wanted—Male

ALL Men, Women, Boys, Girls, 17 to 65 willing to accept Government Positions $117-$250, traveling or stationary, write Mr. Ozment, 308, St. Louis, Mo., immediately.

EARN $120 to $250 monthly, expenses paid as Railway Traffic Inspector. We secure position for you after completion of 3 months' home-study course or money refunded. Excellent opportunity. Write for Free Booklet, CM-28, Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

ESTABLISH YOURSELF—AT HOME—As a Photographic Expert. Make $75 a week while learning. Write at once for Temporary Offer. International Studios, Dept. 1406, 3601 Michigan Ave., Chicago.

MEN WANTING FOREST RANGER, railway mail clerk and other govt. positions, $125 to $225 month. Write for particulars, Mokane, A-41, Denver, Colo.

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS. $1,140-$3,000 year. Men—women, 18 up. Steady work. Paid vacation. Common education sufficient with our coaching. List positions —Free. Write immediately. Franklin Institute, Dept. D2, Rochester, New York.

Help Wanted—Female

$6-$18 A DOZEN decorating pillow tops at home, experience unnecessary; particulars for stamp. Tapestry Paint Co., 110 LaGrange, Ind.

Farm Lands

HERE'S YOUR LAND! $10 down and $10 a month buys twenty acres of my best land near lakes and towns in central Michigan for $400, or ten acres for $250. Write at once for free picture book. G. W. Swigart, S-1276 First Natl. Bank Bldg., Chicago.

Coins and Stamps

OLD MONEY WANTED—Will pay $100.00 for 1894 Dime, S. Mint., $50.00 for 1913 Liberty Head Nickel (not Buffalo). Big premiums paid for all rare coins. Send 4c for Large Coin Folder. May mean much profit to you. Numismatic Co., Dept. 440, Ft. Worth, Tex.

Stammering

ST-STU-T-T-TERING And Stammering Cured at Home. Instructive booklet free. Walter McDonnell, 80 Arcade, 1126 Granville Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Patents and Lawyers

PATENTS. Send sketch or model for preliminary examination. Booklet free. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Watson E. Coleman, Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth St., Washington, D. C.

INVENTIONS COMMERCIALIZED. Patented or unpatented. Write Adam Fisher Mfg. Co., 223, Enright, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENTS—Write for free Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch of invention for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Victor J. Evans Co., 767 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for Inspection and Instructions Free. Terms reasonable. Randolph & Co., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

Detectives Wanted

MEN—Experience unnecessary; travel; make secret investigations; reports; salaries; expenses. Write American Foreign Detective Agency, 114, St. Louis, Mo.

DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY. Travel. Excellent opportunity. Experience unnecessary. Write, George Wagner, former Government Detective, 1968 Broadway, New York.

How to Entertain

PLAYS, MUSICAL COMEDIES AND revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 132, Chicago.

Have You Ever Read Sea Stories Magazine? Good and Exciting

Afraid *of* My Own Voice

But I Learned to Dominate Others Almost Overnight

SUDDENLY the boss turned to me and queried, "Well, Conroy, what's your opinion?" They all listened politely for me to speak and in the silence I heard my thin, wavering voice stammering and sputtering a few vague phrases. Like a flash Stoddard interrupted me and launched on a brilliant description of his plan. All sat spellbound as he talked—my views were forgotten—and yet I have been studying the problem for months and I was prepared to suggest a sound, practical plan which I knew would solve all our difficulties.

And that was the way it always was—I was always being given opportunities to show my ability and always failing miserably. I was bashful, timid, and nervous—I never knew how to express myself, how to put my ideas across. In fact, I was actually afraid of my own voice!

In social life, too, I was a total loss—I was always the "left-over"—the one who sat back and watched the others have a good time. I seemed doomed to be an all around failure unless I could conquer my timidity, my bashfulness, my lack of poise and inability to express myself.

What 15 Minutes A Day Will Show You

How to talk before your club or lodge
How to propose and respond to toasts
How to address board meetings
How to tell entertaining stories
How to make a political speech
How to make after-dinner speeches
How to write letters
How to sell more goods
How to train your memory
How to enlarge your vocabulary
How to develop self-confidence
How to acquire a winning personality
How to strengthen your will power and ambition
How to become a clear, accurate thinker

In 15 Minutes a Day

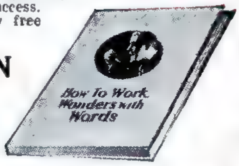
And then suddenly I discovered a new easy method which made me a powerful speaker almost overnight. I learned how to bend others to my will, how to dominate one man or an audience of thousands. Soon I had won salary increases, promotion, popularity, power. Today I am able to rise to any occasion, to meet any emergency with just the right words. And I accomplished all this by developing the natural power of speech possessed by everyone, but cultivated by so few—by simply spending 15 minutes a day in the privacy of my own home.

There is no magic, no trick, no mystery about becoming a powerful and convincing talker. You, too, can **conquer timidity,** stage fright, self-consciousness and bashfulness, winning advancement in salary, popularity, social standing, and success. It is the power of forceful, convincing speech that causes one man to jump from obscurity to the presidency of a great corporation; another from a small unimportant territory to a sales-manager's desk, another from the rank and file of political workers to a post of national importance; a timid, retiring, self-conscious man to change almost overnight into a popular and much applauded after-dinner speaker.

Send for This Amazing Book

This method of training is fully described in a very interesting and informative booklet, **How to Work Wonders with Words.** You are told how to bring out and develop your priceless "hidden knack"—the natural gift within you—which will win for you advancement in position and salary, popularity, social standing, power and real success. You can obtain your copy absolutely free by sending the coupon.

NOW SENT FREE


How To Work Wonders with Words

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Chicago, Illinois

Please send me FREE and without obligation my copy of your famous book, **How to Work Wonders with Words.**

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Address..

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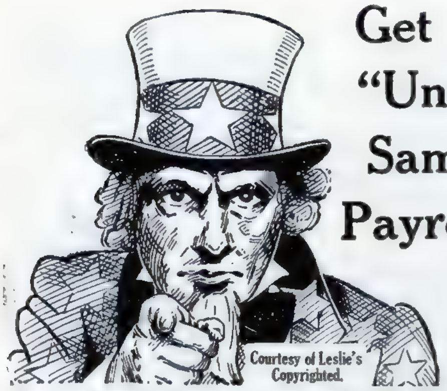

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$1140 to $3300

A YEAR

PICK YOUR JOB

STEADY POSITIONS

These are steady positions. Strikes, poor business conditions, lockouts or politics will not affect them.

RAILWAY POSTAL CLERKS

Railway Postal Clerks get $1,900 the first year, being paid on the first and fifteenth of each month. $78.00 each pay day. Their pay is quickly increased, the maximum being $2,700 a year. $112.50 each pay day.

UNITED STATES MAIL
U S MAIL

WORK 3 DAYS—OFF 3 DAYS

Railway Postal Clerks, have a yearly vacation of 15 working days (about 18 days). On runs, they usually work 3 days and have 3 days off duty or in the same proportion. Their pay continues just as though they were working. They travel on a pass when on business and see the country. When away from home they get extra allowance for hotel. When they grow old, they are retired with a pension.

CITY MAIL CARRIERS POSTOFFICE CLERKS

Clerks and Carriers now get $1,700 first year regular and automatically increase $100 a year to $2,100 and $2,300. They also have 15 days' paid vacation. Examinations are frequently held in the larger cities. City residence is unnecessary.

GENERAL CLERK

(Open to men and women 18 or over)

Salary $1,140 to $1,860 a year. Pleasant clerical work in the various government departments at Washington, D. C., and at various places throughout country.

IS YOUR JOB STEADY?

Compare these conditions with your present or your prospective condition, perhaps changing positions frequently, no chance in sight for PERMANENT employment; frequently out of a position and the year's average salary very low. DO YOU EARN $1,900 EVERY YEAR? HAVE YOU ANY ASSURANCE THAT A FEW YEARS FROM NOW YOU WILL GET $2,700 to $3,000 A YEAR?

YOU CAN GET THEM

These positions are not hard to get. Country residents and city residents stand equal chance. Experience is unnecessary, and political influence is not permitted.

GET FREE LIST OF POSITIONS

Fill out the following coupon. Tear it off and mail it today—now, at once.

DO IT NOW—This investment of two cents for a postage stamp may result in you putting many hundreds to your bank account.

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Rush to me entirely free of charge (1) a full description of the position checked below; (2) Free Copy of 32-page book, "How To Get a U. S. Government Job" with sample coaching; (3) A list of the U. S. Government Jobs now obtainable; (4) Send pointers on how I can get the position I have checked.

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☐ **Postoffice Clerk**..........................($1700-$2300)
☐ **City Mail Carrier**..........................($1700-$2100)
☐ **Rural Mail Carrier**..........................($2100-$3300)
☐ **General Clerk**..........................($1140-$1860)
☐ **Bookkeeper**..........................($1320-$2040)

Name ....

Address ....

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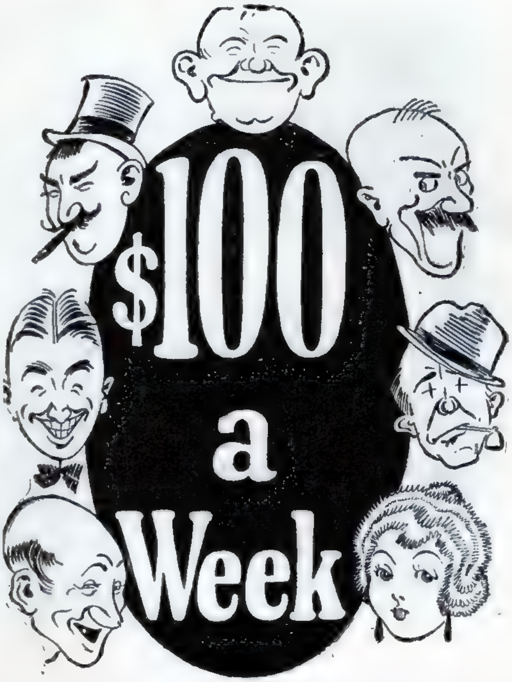

IN DRAWING CARTOONS

Why spend your time doing work that is drudgery, and get little money for it when you can enter this well paid profession? You can learn cartooning at home with this amazing easy method, which teaches you to draw cartoons that sell. You can also earn while you learn.

A steady income—$3,000 to $15,000 a year—your own boss—easy hours—no off seasons—that's the life of a good cartoonist. Right now you may be earning only a pitifully small salary—but with this training you can easily learn cartooning and there's always a demand for good cartoonists.

Easy to Learn Cartooning At Home in Spare Time

There is a knack about learning cartooning which you can master in your spare time with this simple home study method. It starts you at the very beginning—on simple fundamental principles—then takes you through every branch of humorous and serious cartooning. You will be surprised how quickly you can draw cartoons that will sell. Many earn even while learning.

Send for Free Book

Get this handsomely illustrated booklet which gives the details of this remarkable home study course in Cartooning. Gives thorough outline of the cartooning field and market for cartoons. Shows how to become a cartoonist. No obligation. Send for it today. **WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF CARTOONING, Room 541-E, 1113—15th St., N. W., Washington, D. C.**

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Please send me without obligation, your Free Booklet on Cartooning, and full details of your home study method of teaching Cartooning.

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Address ....

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$35 TO $75 WEEKLY

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- ( ) Forest Ranger
- ( ) File Clerk
- ( ) Matron
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- ( ) Chauffeur-Carrier
- ( ) Skilled Laborer
- ( ) Watchman
- ( ) Postmaster
- ( ) RFD Carrier
- ( ) Meat Inspector
- ( ) Special Agent (investigator)
- ( ) Stenographer-Typist
- ( ) Immigrant Inspector
- ( ) City Mail Carrier
- ( ) U. S. Border Patrol
- ( ) Typist
- ( ) Seamstress
- ( ) Steno-Secretary
- ( ) Auditor

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Send me particulars about positions marked "X" —salaries, locations, opportunities, etc.

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ADDRESS____________________________

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FREE when you enroll **$15 HAWAIIAN GUITAR and Case**

Only 4 Motions used in playing this fascinating instrument. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

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After you get the four easy motions you play harmonious chords with very little practice. No previous musical knowledge necessary.

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Even if you don't know one note from another, the 52 printed lessons and the clear pictures make it easy to learn quickly. Pay as you play.

Free Guitar
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Write at Once
You'll never be lonesome with this beautiful Hawaiian Guitar. Write for Special Offer and easy terms. A postcard will do. ACT!

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Money-Making Tools

To those who enroll in near future—tools
FREE
of any extra cost whatever Also a drafting table! Act now!

I need YOU with 100 firms BEGGING ME to send them more DRAFTSMEN. Many offer to take BEGINNERS, at $50 a WEEK. Graduates can start at $90 and $100! GET BUSY!

Drafting is the BIG field, men. Every industry you can name BEGINS with the draftsman. Without mechanical drawings—by the thousands—every shop in the land would be STOPPED.

In fact, it is the SERIOUS SHORTAGE of draftsmen that brings this offer: *I will furnish all instruments, supplies, even to the table, to those who start now!*

PAY AS YOU GO Don't give me the excuse that you have no ready money for this golden opportunity. I am not so interested in *cash;* I want your *application.* I want at least 200 men to start *right now.* I want them ready to recommend by Spring! We will get a flood of letters saying "send us draftsmen," from every sort of industrial and engineering concern, and we *must* make good.

The first week's pay envelope of many a Dobe-trained draftsman has held enough to cover the entire cost of the course! Most students learn evenings, keeping on with their old work until ready to step into somebody's drafting room. The first month equips you to take on simple drafting jobs on the side. It helps you learn; I gladly permit this.

Well-Paid Positions Every Way You Turn

A draftsman soon forgets the days when he used to wonder where to get a job. Instead, he asks "What line of work interests me most?" And "What part of the country suits me best?" Twenty of my graduates went to Florida this year; three are in Japan; last month one wrote me from Ceylon. And I wish we had the count of how many Dobe draftsmen have become chiefs!

Positions loom up almost as soon as you are enrolled in a Dobe class! We receive requests *daily* for junior men—for men only partly through our course. "We'll take a *beginner,*" some concerns write us, "so long as he is a Dobe-trained man and has begun *right!*"

IT'S EASY and interesting to learn drafting. For drafting isn't "drawing"! You don't need any "talent." A draftsman uses *tools* for every line and every curve. You couldn't make them crooked if you tried! That's why drafting is so easily learned—and so interesting. *For you do everything by rule.* So, I guarantee to make *anyone* a finished draftsman: if you can read and write, you can learn this line. One of my students is 51 years old: another is just seventeen. *But they'll all be making a grown-up salary by Spring!*

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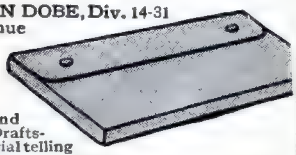


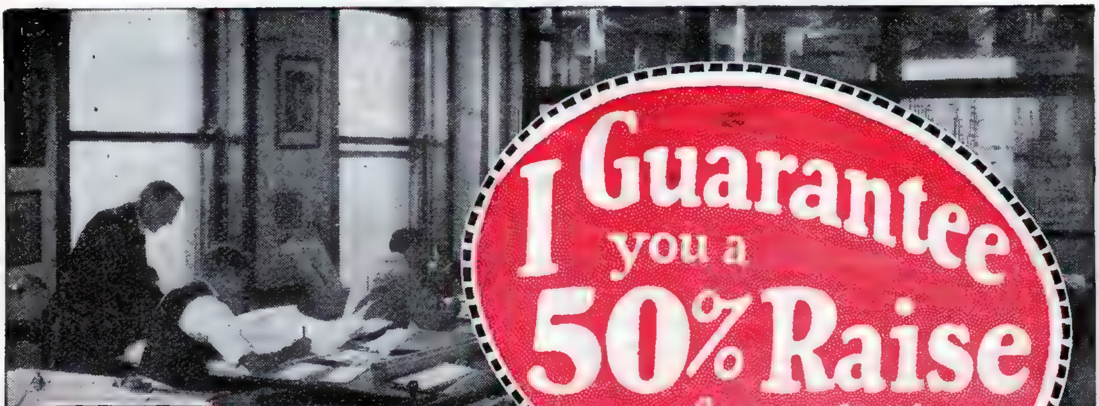
Special Tool Offer

Send me FREE and POSTPAID Successful Draftsmanship Book and material telling all about your home course, terms, etc.

Name.. *Age*...............

Address ....

P. O. .... *State*.....................



O. C. Miller

**Director Extension Work
American School**

I have recommended Drafting to hundreds of men, including the sons of many personal friends. I recommend it to **you** for the same reasons: Drafting offers more and better positions, higher salaries, richer opportunities for promotion than other lines of work, yet it may be quickly and easily learned at home, in spare time. You need no artistic "talent" to master it because the work is purely "mechanical." Yet it brings you into the heart of Industrial activity, where important plans are originated, where all building and manufacturing are begun and detailed and supervised.

O C Miller
Director Extension Work

IF you are now earning $40 a week or less, I guarantee to prepare you for a fine Drafting Job at home in your spare time—I guarantee to help you find such a position paying 50% MORE THAN YOU EARN TODAY, within 60 days after you complete this training, or I will refund the small amount you pay for tuition. We make this agreement to prove that this training WILL make you a REAL DRAFTSMAN! Back of this guarantee are the entire resources and reputation of this million dollar institution.

Go into DRAFTING!

Salaries $60 to $125 a week

Drafting is the **entering wedge** to success in all building and engineering lines, in electricity, auto and mechanical industries. Thousands of well-paid positions are open **right now** in all parts of the U. S. The demand for **real Draftsmen,** capable of designing and calculating ORIGINAL WORK far exceeds the supply. Drafting is fascinating, pleasant work. It brings you in contact with the BIG MEN of Industry and so offers frequent opportunities.

Drafting Made EASY to Learn!

You'll be surprised how QUICKLY you can learn by our new one-step-at-a-time method! We start you off doing actual Drafting room jobs from the very beginning. Soon we give you practice in advanced engineering subjects.

We frequently can place our students in well-paid beginner's positions within a few months after enrolling.

This guaranteed training, backed with a definite employment service, **is within your reach,** in **understanding,** because **simplified** for men with only common schooling; in **cost,** because the tuition is low and the terms **only a few dollars a month!**

You owe it to yourself to look into the opportunities waiting for you in DRAFTING. Find out what salaries are paid to trained Draftsmen, what positions are open, what sort of progress they make. Find out how easily you can learn the work, and how we help you every step of the way until you are actually placed in a good Drafting Job. Mail the coupon—NOW—and I'll give you all the facts.

Professional Outfit Given!

You will naturally expect the American School to give you the best kind of instruments and tools with the best kind of training. This outfit is good enough to use professionally after you finish your training.

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HOW TO GET INTO THE RADIO BUSINESS"

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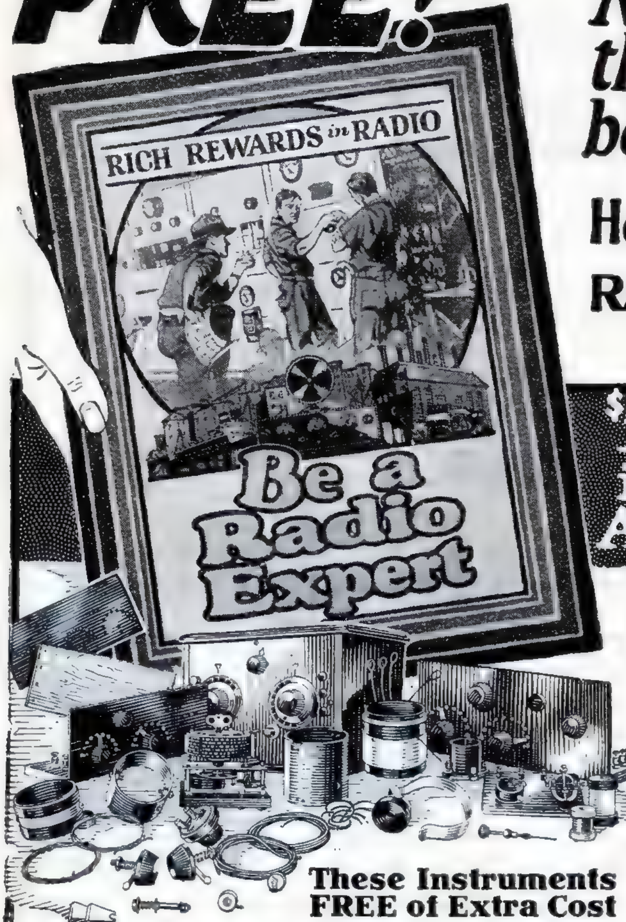

$50 to $250 a Week in Work That is Almost Romance

If you're earning a **penny less than $50 a week,** clip coupon now for FREE BOOK! New book, profusely illustrated, tells all about the Radio Profession, thousands of openings—**in work that is almost romance!** YOU can learn quickly and easily at home, through our tested, improved methods, to take advantage of these great opportunities! Why go along at $25 or $35 or $45 a week, when you can pleasantly and in a short time learn to be a Radio Expert, capable of holding the big jobs—paying **$50 to $250 a week?**

Clip Coupon for Free Book

Don't envy the other fellow who's pulling down the big cash! Our proven home-study training methods make it possible for you, too, to get ready for a better job, to earn enough money so you can enjoy all the good things of life. Most amazing book ever written on Radio tells how—thousands of interesting facts about this great field, and how we can prepare you, quickly and easily in your spare time at home, to step into a big-pay Radio job. You can do what thousands of others have done through our training. GET THIS NEW FREE BOOK. SEND COUPON TODAY.

J. E. SMITH, President

National Radio Institute

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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All instruments shown here and others—SIX BIG OUTFITS—sent to all our students free of extra cost under short time special offer. **Clip coupon now**—find out all about this big unequalled offer while you still have time to take advantage of it. Our training is intensely practical—these instruments help you learn to do the practical work. Receiving sets, from simplest kind to thousand-mile receiver. Many other big features.

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President

My Radio Training Is the Famous "Course That Pays for Itself"

Spare time earnings are easy in Radio when you know it the way we teach you. Increase your income almost from the start of your course thru practical knowledge we give you. We show you how to hold the job, then our big Free Employment Department helps you get one. Free Book "Rich Rewards in Radio" tells how.

Howard B. Luce, of Friedens, Pa., made $320 in 7 weeks during his spare time. D. H. Suitt of Newport, Ark., writes, "While taking the course I earned in spare time work approximately $900." Earl Wright of Omaha, reports making $400 in a short time while taking his course—working at Radio in his spare time only! Sylvester Senso, 207 Elm Street, Kaukauna, Wis., made $500.

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NOW! Special Short Time Offer 6 BIG OUTFITS

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Dear Mr. Smith:
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Town ....**State**.............

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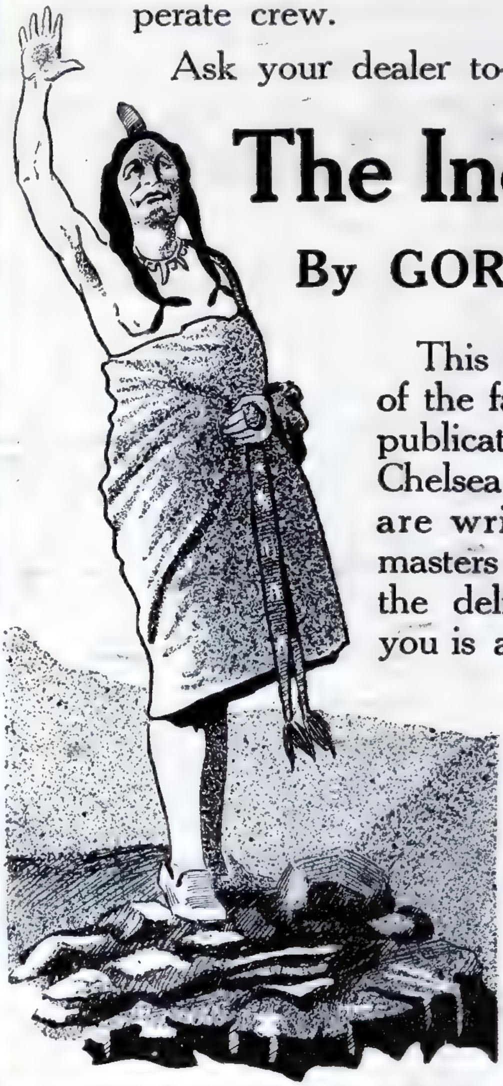
Far up on the dizzy heights of the Peruvian Mountains was hidden away a vast treasure horde. For centuries the Inca Indians had kept watch over their gold mines, beating off marauding whites.

In a story of adventure altogether different from any you have ever read, you can learn how the treasure of the Indians was protected from the onslaughts of a desperate crew.



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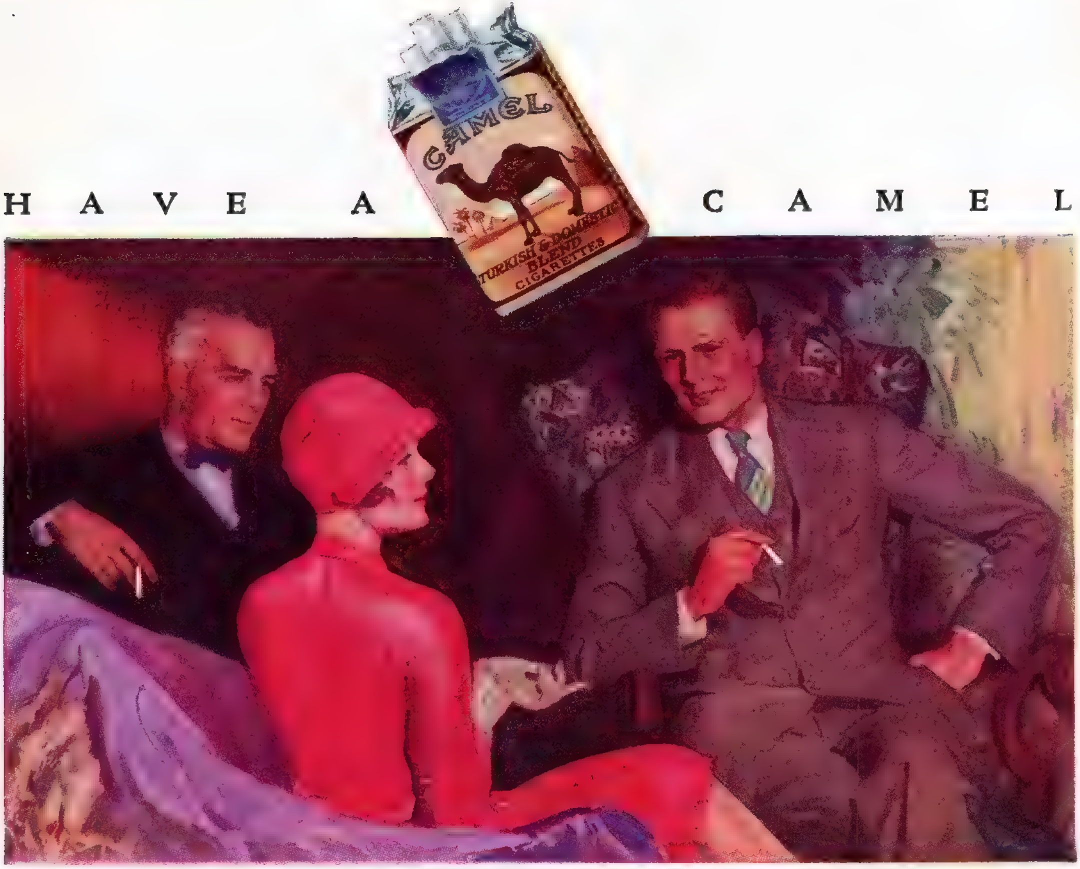

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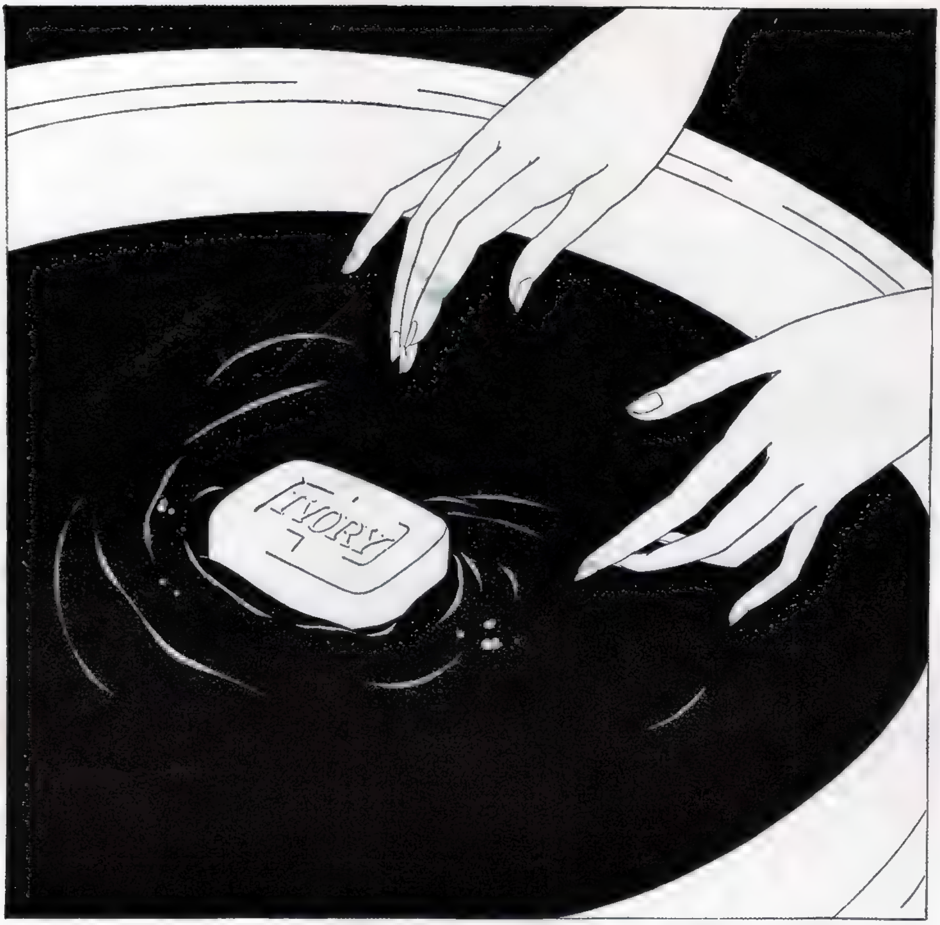

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JANUARY
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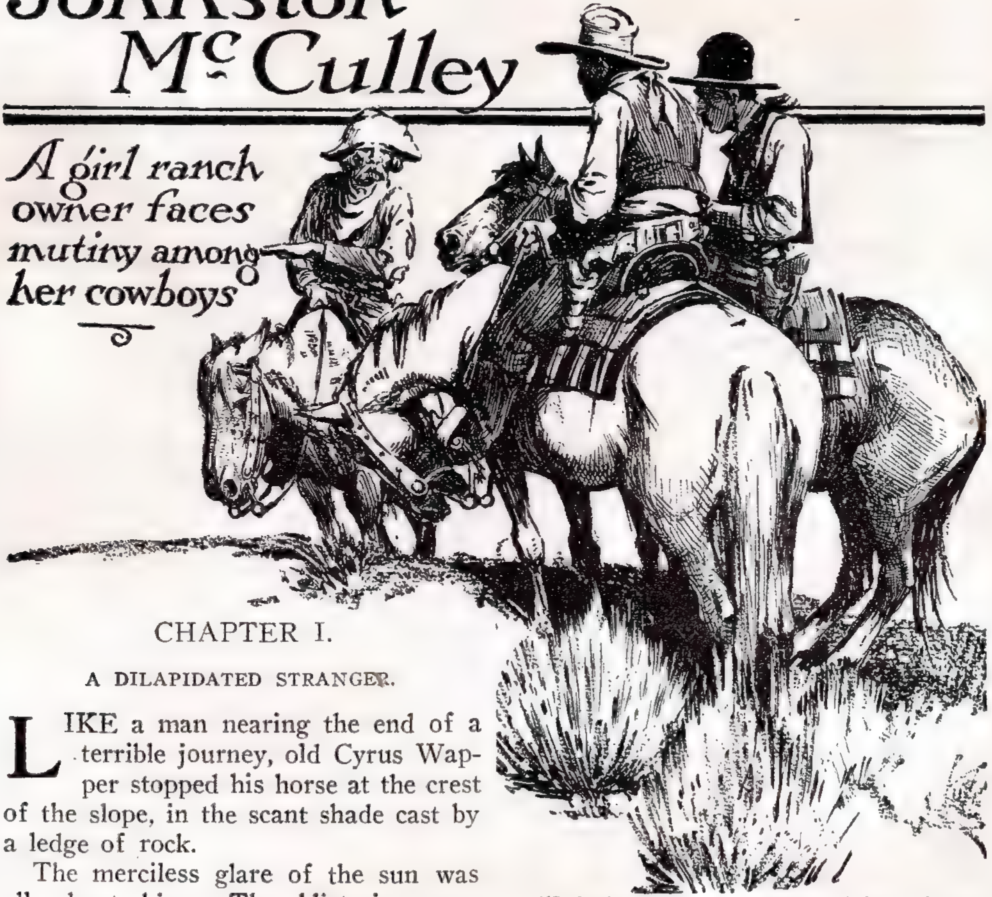
Volume III-Number 6

The Broken Dollar

Johnston McCulley

A girl ranch owner faces mutiny among her cowboys



"I don't aim to be insultin'; I just aim to 'tend to my business," Old Cy announced to the owner of the F Bar G.

CHAPTER I.

A DILAPIDATED STRANGER.

LIKE a man nearing the end of a terrible journey, old Cyrus Wapper stopped his horse at the crest of the slope, in the scant shade cast by a ledge of rock.

The merciless glare of the sun was all about him. The blistering rays seemed to bounce back as they struck against the hard-baked earth. And heat waves danced in endless movement across the rocks and sage, while little swirls of dust and sand, driven by gusts of hot breeze, drifted over the parched landscape.

Cyrus Wapper slouched to one side of his saddle, and forward, as though about to tumble from his mount. His body swayed for a moment from weakness. His eyes were closed. He gave a deep sigh, and tried to compel himself to sit more erectly.

He opened his eyes again. Little, faded eyes they were, mere slits in a face that had been bronzed by the sun and wind of countless years on the open range. But, by careful focusing, they still served him. And he could make out the little town in the distance.

"That'll be her!" old Cyrus Wapper said, speaking to himself and his mount in a thin, squeaky voice.

Once more he gave a sigh of utter weariness, and then, reaching for his battered canteen, held it to his ear, and gently sloshed the water it contained. He unscrewed the cap and took a drink. Warm, stagnant stuff it was; but, at least, it was damp.

Replacing the cap on the canteen, he removed his battered hat and took from a pocket a red bandanna handkerchief. His hand trembled as he wiped the perspiration from his face and neck. After a time he replaced his hat and the handkerchief, and fumbled in a pocket of his shirt for cigarette tobacco and papers.

There was nothing of the dashing cowboy about Cyrus Wapper. His age was something for men to guess about, but it was more than sixty. His body were about to fall to pieces; and his hands gnarled; while his countenance was a thing of crisscrossed wrinkles. His thin frame was clothed in tatters. There were holes in his shirt and overalls; his boots looked as though they were about to fall to pieces; and his leather chaps were worn through in spots.

He had a ragged blanket, in which he had rolled two pairs of socks and a shirt slightly better than the one he was wearing, but clean. An old razor, a worn-out shaving brush and a bit of shaving soap were there, too; as was likewise part of a plug of chewing tobacco. That tobacco was a reserve supply, for, if compelled to go without food, old Cyrus Wapper could exist for a time on drinking water and chewing tobacco. And he had proved the fact.

The horse he rode bore a brand unknown to the local range. But Cyrus Wapper had no reason to fear the possibility of men thinking that he was a horse thief, for no man in his right mind would have stolen such a horse. He was as battered as the rider, a sort of tramp horse, in fact. And his appearance gave the idea that recently he had found the going difficult. But he was a little better off than his master, for a horse can subsist on grass; and old Cyrus Wapper had camped the night before up in the hills beside a trickling stream, where there had been grass in abundance.

"Yep, that must be her!" Cyrus Wapper told himself again, as he looked once more at the distant town. "It's about three, four mile farther on, I reckon. Had a time gettin' here, but here we be. Sunglare, huh? The man as named that town was a right good hand at pickin' out names."

The little cow town of Sunglare sat at the head of a slope where the hills met the plains. By day it knew blistering heat, and by night a cooling breeze. In the winter it grew to be very well acquainted with raging blizzards. It was thirty miles from a railroad, and had but one main trail, which ran due north and south. Supplies were freighted from the county seat. Sunglare was merely a trading post for a few ranches and small mines, an excuse for a town that could be visited by cow-punchers and miners eager to get action when they drew their pay.

But Cyrus Wapper did not spend much time in contemplation of the miniature metropolis, for he had seen plenty of cow towns in his day. He had investigated them from the Mexican border to the Canadian line, tame ones and wild ones, big ones and little ones, obscure and famous ones. Sunglare, he felt reasonably sure, could show him nothing strikingly new. But a man can never tell.

Sitting up somewhat straighter in his saddle, Old Cy sighed again and proceeded to inspect the terrain. Before him stretched an endless vista of parched land dotted with sage and rocks, and seamed with dry watercourses. The dusty trail wound like a great serpent down a gradual slope to the town. And moving black dots on the trail told of horsemen.

"Huh! Pay day!" Cyrus Wapper said. He spoke out of the wisdom of his years. "Not a bad day to arrive. Least I hope that it won't be a bad one."

He decided that he might as well continue the journey without further delay. Tugging at his battered hat, he pulled it down so that it would shade his eyes some against the glare of the sun. He reached for his neckerchief, to pull it up over his mouth and keep out the fine dust of the trail.

But, before he could pull it up, there descended upon him half a dozen horsemen. They were well mounted, evidently well fed and prosperous, riding at a good rate of speed, and laughing and joking as they rode. One of them was howling a popular range song. The sight of them convinced Cyrus Wapper that he had guessed correctly—it was pay day in Sunglare.

Old Cy's ancient horse seemed to return to life in a measure, for he put up his ears and swerved to one side of the trail. The horsemen came to an abrupt stop in a cloud of flying dust and sand. They surrounded Cyrus Wapper instantly. And though he did not know it at the time, Old Cy was now confronted by Hugh Fraysig, owner of the F Bar G outfit, a roaring brute of a man who knew his strength, but did not know enough to control it. With him was George Ramberg, his foreman, and also some of the F Bar G punchers.

"A stranger!" Hugh Fraysig snarled. "I thought, at first, that you might be one of them Circle P skunks. Who are you, and where are you going?"

"Me? You said it—I'm a stranger," Cyrus Wapper replied, giving them a friendly grin. "I don't belong to any outfit. I'm ridin' to Sunglare."

"And just what is your business in Sunglare?" Fraysig demanded.

Cyrus Wapper's faded eyes narrowed slightly, causing deep wrinkles to appear between them. He liked neither the question nor the manner in which it was asked.

"My business is nothin' that concerns you, whoever you are," Old Cy stated. "I don't know anybody on this range, or any of the outfits. Nor any of this range's troubles—if there are any."

George Ramberg suddenly urged his horse forward. "Don't go to gettin' insultin' about it!" he warned. "You're talkin' to Mr. Fraysig, who owns the F Bar G!"

"I don't aim to be insultin'," Cyrus Wapper announced. "I just aim to 'tend to my own business. Sometimes it takes a good man to do that."

"Why, you——" Ramberg began.

Hugh Fraysig put out his hand quickly in signal to stop the foreman's speech. Then he looked Cyrus Wapper over from his battered hat to his tattered boots. His lips curled in an unmistakable sneer.

"From the looks of you, Mr. Stranger, the town of Sunglare won't care a heap whether you visit it or not," he remarked. "Range tramp, huh?"

Cyrus Wapper's pale eyes seemed to take fire, and his thin shoulders straightened. "I'm not beggin' you for anything—not even for a job," he said.

"A job!" Fraysig snorted. "I might give you a job as scarecrow, to stand between the two cherry trees I've got in my back yard. I don't reckon that you'll ever get to Sunglare anyway. You don't look like you're strong enough to stand the trip. And that horse of yours is about ready to fall down, too. Walkin' boneyard, that horse is!"

"Yeh? Neither me nor my horse is in what you might call the pink o' condition," Cyrus Wapper replied. "But we ain't askin' anybody's help."

"Snappy, ain't you?" Hugh Fraysig said, his lips curling once more. "And that six-gun you're wearin'—it looks like it had come from some museum."

"Old, but reliable," said Cyrus Wapper.

"Intimatin' that you're the same?"

"I reckon that I am. I've always done my work—and stood by my friends."

"You look to me like a man who never had any friends," Fraysig declared. "And I'm ready to bet that you never hurt yourself workin', either. You can't come here and sponge a living off this range. We haven't any use around here for range tramps."

"Are you runnin' this range?" Old Cy snapped.

Hugh Fraysig rode a bit closer. "Matter of fact, I am!" he replied. "And you'd better remember the fact! Just now, we happen to be checkin' up on all strangers, men who ain't attached to any outfit."

"Yeh? Well, I met Mr. Bill Mattise, the sheriff, down in the county seat, and he never mentioned to me that you was a deputy of his."

"I'll make a bet that you met up with him! How long did he keep you in his little dobe jail?" Fraysig asked.

"You can be right down insultin' when you want to be, can't you?" said Cyrus Wapper. "What are you pickin' on me for? I'm a stranger, and I'm entitled to be treated decent until I show that I ain't a fit man to be treated that way."

Hugh Fraysig laughed at him. Ramberg and the punchers joined in the laughter for the F Bar G was an outfit where it paid to follow the owner's lead in all things.

"Oh, I guess that you're harmless enough!" Fraysig said. "All jokes aside, are you broke and lookin' for a job?"

"Me? Huh! You c'n see that I'm broke!" Cyrus Wapper told him. "I might remark that I ain't had anything to eat since yesterday mornin'."

"How come you didn't bump off somebody's steer and cut yourself a few steaks?"

"I ain't a rustler!" Old Cy said, his eyes flashing.

"Well, if you manage to get to town, you might wash dishes for a meal at the Chinaman's restaurant," Fraysig told him. "He always needs help on pay day."

"Thanks very much!" Old Cy replied dryly. "It's a good tip. Maybe I'll look up that Chinaman. He might have a heart—you never c'n tell!"

"Look me up in town, too," Fraysig directed. "Maybe I can give you a job on the F Bar G, splittin' wood and carryin' water for the cook. I'll think about it."

"Uh-huh! I c'n do a man's work yet, mister! And I reckon that I wouldn't want to work for you. I'm right down particular about my bosses," said Cyrus Wapper.

George Ramberg urged his mount forward again. "Say, you bum!" he cried out. "You cut out talkin' to Mr. Fraysig that way, or I'll handle you!"

Old Cy looked him straight in the eyes. "There's nothin' to stop you," he replied. "I can't fight a whole outfit, an old man like me. But I'm just wonderin' if you'd talk that big to a strong young man."

"Why, you old——" Ramberg began.

"Stop it!" Fraysig commanded. "Don't waste any more time on the old coot! Let's ride!"

They laughed again; and then galloped down the trail in a cloud of dust, while their sarcastic laughter floated back to the ears of old Cyrus Wapper. He pulled up his tattered neckerchief, settled himself in the saddle, and urged his skinny mount on.

"Seems like there's fools all over the world," said Old Cy to himself. "Only difference is, some of 'em are bigger fools than others. Fraysig of the F Bar G, huh? Thinks that he's king of the universe, I reckon. He ain't got any patent on that. I've seen a lot like him."

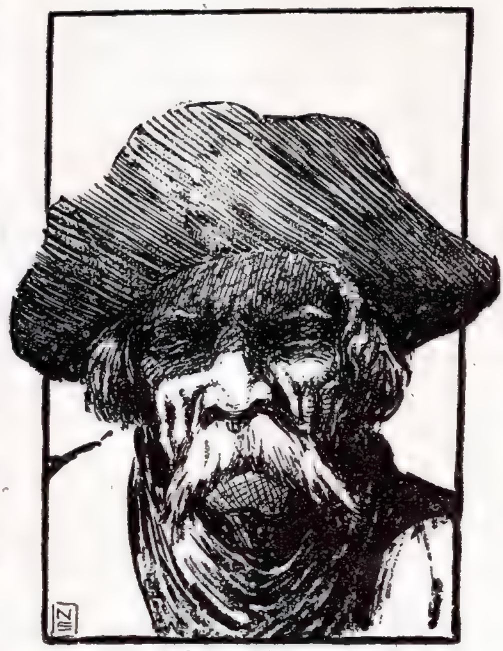
Through the blistering heat he rode, sparing his mount and himself as much as possible. And in time he came to one end of the single crooked street that the town of Sunglare boasted, and started riding slowly along it. A single glance sufficed to establish the town firmly in his mind. It was similar to countless others that he had seen. Sunglare had no originality.

There appeared to be one big, popular resort, and Cy Wapper stopped his horse in front of it. A sun-blistered, warped sign over the doorway announced that it was The Mansion. Old Cy grinned when he read the name.

He dismounted stiffly and tethered his horse to the hitching rack in the shade, in front of The Mansion. He leaned weakly against the rack for a moment, eyes closed. The street was thronged with the pay-day crowd; but everybody seemed too busy to do more than glance swiftly at the newcomer.

"Well, horse, we're here!" Old Cy said softly. "We might as well be here as any place else, I reckon. Our luck can't be any worse, and it might get better. Now I'll look up that restaurant as was mentioned back there on the trail."

Fifteen minutes later, after an exhaustive argument, Cyrus Wapper was washing greasy dishes for a greasy Oriental who chattered at him continually, with the promise of ham and eggs, potatoes and coffee when he had finished.



Cyrus Wapper.

CHAPTER II.

A DIFFERENT SORT OF STRANGER.

SWAYING gracefully in his expensive saddle, his hat at a jaunty angle on his head, his pale-blue silk neckerchief pulled up almost to his eyes, Phil Droten rode toward the town of Sunglare.

Cyrus Wapper had approached the town from the north. Phil Droten came upon it from the south. And there was as much difference between the two men as there was between the directions of their approach.

Phil Droten was thirty, broad of shoulder and lean of hip, and tall. His features were regular and pleasant; and he had the sort of eyes and hair that women admire. Moreover, he rode an excellent horse, and was dressed almost like a dude puncher. He was well fed, too.

Yet Phil Droten was by no means an irresponsible, happy-go-lucky young man inclined to think of women and dancing, drink and cards to the exclusion of everything else. He had a father who had made it a part of his business to rear his only son to be a credit to him and to the family name.

Shading his eyes with a hand, Phil Droten looked ahead at the town. He had caught several glimpses of it before, as he had followed the up-and-down trail. But for some time he had been riding along the bed of a dry watercourse where he could see nothing; and now he emerged from it to behold Sunglare in all its ugliness only a mile or so away.

Unlike old Cyrus Wapper, Phil Droten had no ledge of rock to throw a friendly shade for him, for he was approaching over the level country, where there was nothing larger than a clump of sage to cast a shadow. But he stopped his horse, as old Cyrus Wapper had stopped his, though not because of fatigue.

"There she is, hoss!" Phil Droten said, aloud, patting his horse on the neck as though to call the animal's attention to their destination. "As much as there is of it, there it is!"

He dropped his neckerchief down from his face, and drank from his canteen. He removed his hat, wiped the perspiration away, and dusted the hat carefully before he replaced it upon his head. Then he got down from the saddle, trailed the reins, and slapped the dust from his clothing. He even wiped off his boots with a soiled handkerchief.

Getting back into the saddle again, Phil Droten made certain that his silk neckerchief was knotted in the most approved fashion. And it would have seemed evident to an observer that he was determined to make as good an impression as possible as he entered the town of Sunglare. The dude part of him was showing for an instant.

But it did not show in his face as he rode on at a moderate rate of speed. His countenance reflected the fact that he was thinking deeply about something, and his manner was that of a cool, logical thinker, too. He gave the impression of a young man who could arrive at a determination after constructive thought, select a course to follow, and then follow it unswervingly.

But the serious expression disappeared from his face as he neared the town, and he became watchful and alert, even slightly amused. He was like a tourist trying to see all the sights at once. Only, there was nothing new or novel about a cow town to Phil Droten, since he had been born on a ranch, knew little except the life there, and had seen many cow towns.

He commenced humming a range song as he rode, leaning to one side of the saddle gracefully, and seeming a part of the animal he bestrode. His right hand strayed to the butt of the gun at his hip, as though mechanically. Subconsciously, almost, he was making certain that the weapon was there, ready for instant use if the necessity came.

Into the end of the street he rode, to find that it was crowded with the pay-day throng and that his progress along it would necessarily be slow. To his right there was a livery stable with a corral behind it, so Phil Droten rode into the stable. A man came from the semidarkness of the interior to attend his wants.

"I reckon this is Sunglare?" he asked, smiling down at the stableman.

"Nothin' else!" the stableman replied.

"Good enough!" Phil Droten remarked, as he dismounted and stretched his limbs to be rid of the saddle cramp. "If this is Sunglare, it's where I'm stoppin' for the present. I want my hoss put up and cared for right. Please understand that I said 'right.' I don't aim to be sassy, callin' your attention to the word that way. I'm jus' explainin', in a mild manner, so there won't be any misunderstandin', that I want this particular hoss 'tended to right. I don't care much how you 'tend to other hosses, mules and jackasses, not to mention burros. But this hoss—well——"

"You want him 'tended to right—I've got it!" the stableman put in.

"Yeh! I'm glad that you understand," Phil Droten told him. "That makes everything clear and simple. I may want that hoss before night, and I may not want him until to-morrow. But when I want him, I'll want him."

"I reckon that I c'n manage to understand that, too," the stableman said. "You want him tended to right, and you want him when you want him."

"Yeh! If I don't want him before that," Phil Droten went on to say, smiling. "Fella, we sure and certain understand each other fine!" He glanced through the doorway and up the busy street. "So this is Sunglare!" he remarked again.

"She sure is, stranger. There ain't so many towns in this part of the country that a man can be mixed up bad."

Droten turned. "The name is Phil Droten," he announced. "It's my real, genuine name. I noticed just now from the corner of my eye that you were lookin' pretty strong at the brand on that hoss. You probably never saw one exactly like it before. I've come a good ways on him. But allow me to announce, if there's anybody interested, the sheriff and such, that it is my own hoss and was branded personal by my dad. He owns the brand and the ranch that the hoss came from."

"My good gosh! I wasn't hintin' anything at all about that there horse," the stableman declared quickly. "I was only admirin' him."

"And well you may!" said young Droten. "There's a sure-enough hoss, if I do say it myself. "He's got speed and stamina and good looks. His daddy was a good hoss, too."

"Are you goin' to be with us long?" the stableman inquired.

"Quien sabe?" was Phil's remark.

"Oh! Like that, huh?"

"Uh-huh!" Phil Droten replied. "I'm just out takin' a good look at all the country. I'll take a good job, if I can get one that suits."

"Puncher, o' course?"

"I aim to be," Phil Droten replied. "Fair enough to hold down a job, I reckon."

"You look it," the stableman admitted. "There are two big outfits hereabouts. Hugh Fraysig owns the F Bar G. But he's sure a mean cuss. He's got a mean foreman, too."

"Yeh? Mean cusses have been tamed before now," Phil Droten remarked. "But I never like to work under a man I've got to fight all the time."

"The other big outfit is the Circle P. I reckon you might have heard tell of that. It's owned by a girl," stated the stableman.

"That sure sounds right interestin'."

"Her name is Nancy Plake," the stableman continued. "She's some girl! Every man on this range will scrap for her at the mere droppin' of a hat."

"Yeh? She must be quite some girl, then," Phil commented.

"Her dad died about six weeks ago," the other continued. "Good old man, her dad! He left her the ranch and everything. Her foreman, Sam Vonner, and James Tragman, the town banker, are managin' it for her, accordin' to her dad's wishes."

"Good men?" Phil Droten asked.

"Tragman is the regulation skinflint banker, with a leanin' to first mortgages and such. But he tended to all Old Man Plake's business, so I guess that he's honest enough. Plake was laid up for almost two years before he died. Paralysis. Horse throwed him," was the answer.

"And how about the foreman?" Droten asked.

"Sam Vonner? He knows his business and handles men fine. Solid kind o' man. Runs entirely to business. Don't drink or gamble or play around with the boys much. Itchin' to get rich, I reckon. Them kind is dangerous. He's about forty, Sam is. Nancy is twenty-three. It'd be a good outfit to work for. Then there's a few smaller outfits, o' course."

"Yeh? Not for me! I always aim to travel in the swiftest company," Phil Droten declared, as he rolled a cigarette. "The best or nothin'—that's me!"

"There's a little game on right now," the gossipy stableman went on to say. "Some say as how San Vonner is tryin' to make up to Nancy Plake. He wants to marry her and get his hands on the ranch, I reckon. And so does Hugh Fraysig."

"He owns the other big outfit, I believe you said?" Phil inquired.

"Yeh! His outfit is the F Bar G, and it adjoins the Circle P. He don't care a hang about the girl herself, or any other woman. But I imagine that he'd like to marry her and hook up the Circle P with his own F Bar G. That would make one whale of an outfit. It'd put a stop to a feud, too. Them two outfits has always been fighting', long as I c'n remember."

"You certainly have handed me a big mess of information," Phil Droten said. "You haven't any business runnin' a stable, man! You're wastin' your talents. You'd ought to be runnin' a newspaper."

CHAPTER III.

DROTEN GETS A JOB.

PHIL DROTEN took the sting out of his remarks by smiling at the stableman. Then he went out into the street, swaggering a little.

Immediately he found himself in the midst of the pay-day throng. Cowpunchers flashed him a glance and stamped on their minds the fact that he was unknown to them, and let it go at that. They were busy getting their pay and spending it, buying needed supplies at the general store, and preparing to amuse themselves. Pay-day hours were too precious to be spent looking at strangers. And The Mansion was already thronged.

So Phil Droten turned his steps toward that social center of the town. He crowded his way through the open front door and stood to one side to get the sun glare out of his eyes.

The Mansion presented the usual picture of saloon, gambling den and dance hall combined. Poker games were running. A tinpan piano was being hammered. Punchers were gossiping at the tops of their voices.

And it was at this instant that old Cyrus Wapper entered The Mansion. He had eaten all that he wanted, for the Chinaman had taken a fancy to him. Therefore, he had in his possession a dollar, donated by the same Chinaman, as well as the promise of another meal. So Cyrus Wapper felt prosperous.

He wanted to purchase a drink. Some years before, he had ceased drinking for the sake of conviviality. But he felt that he needed this one drink as medicine, after his long and tiresome ride, the exposure, and lack of sufficient food.

So he had decided that he would spend a part of his precious dollar to make himself as fit as possible. He was jostled this way and that in the crowd as he entered the big room, jostling against Phil Droten among others, which attracted Droten's attention to him.

"Some crowd, puncher!" Droten said.

Old Cy's eyes suddenly glowed, and he gave a wrinkled smile. Here was a young man who called him "puncher" instead of "range tramp." A proper sort of young man, too, from the looks of him.

"Yeh!" Old Cy admitted. "It's the regular pay-day frolic, I reckon. I—

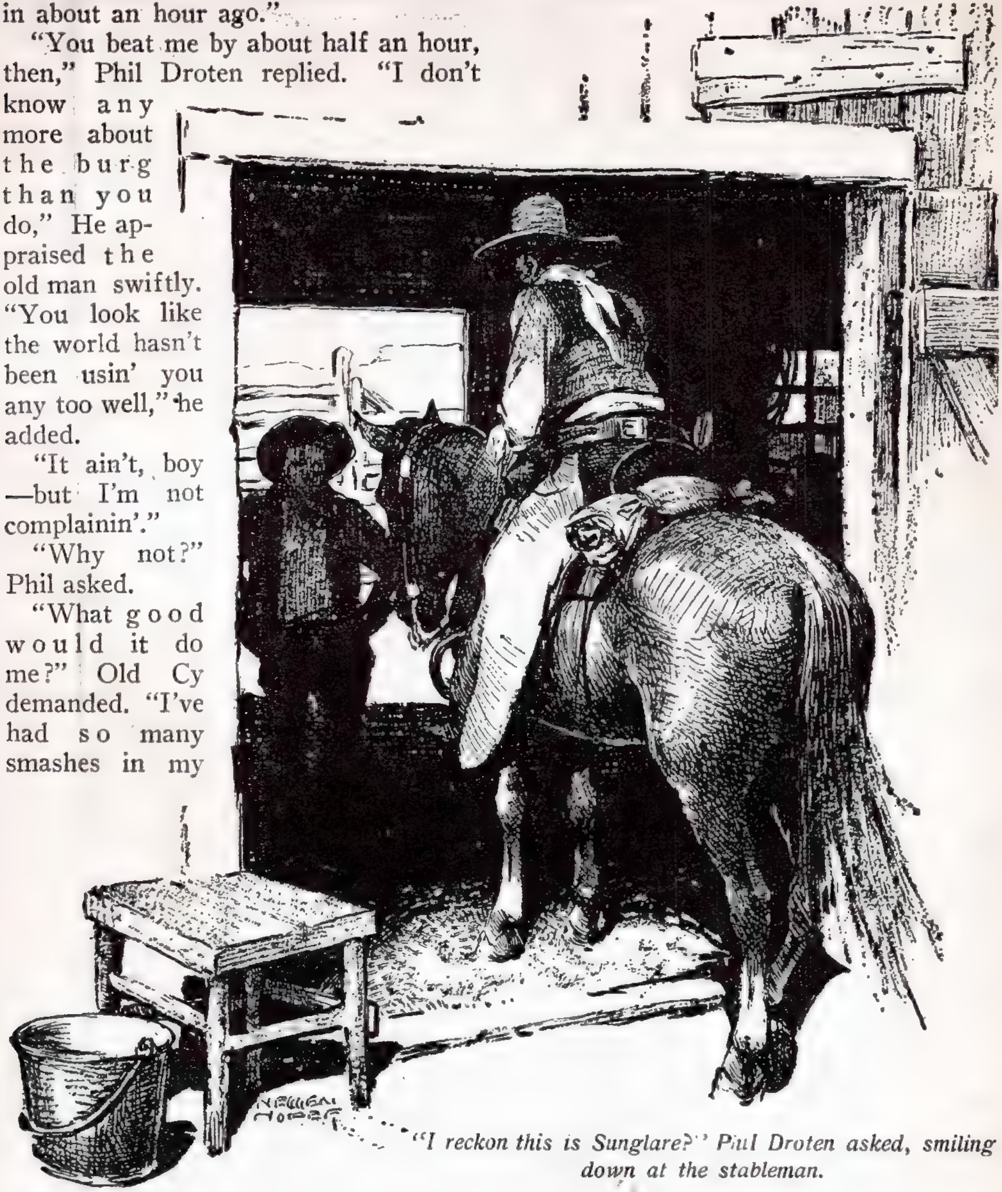
I'm a stranger in this here town. Got in about an hour ago."

"You beat me by about half an hour, then," Phil Droten replied. "I don't know any more about the burg than you do," He appraised the old man swiftly. "You look like the world hasn't been usin' you any too well," he added.

"It ain't, boy—but I'm not complainin'."

"Why not?" Phil asked.

"What good would it do me?" Old Cy demanded. "I've had so many smashes in my life, son, that I'm used to them. I can stand and take 'em like a youngster. I reckon that they've toughened me."



"I reckon this is Sunglare?" Phil Droten asked, smiling down at the stableman.

"Goin' to work here?" Phil inquired.

"I am if I c'n get me a job. Foremen generally take one look at me and jus' smile," the old man said.

"Yeh, and I'll bet that you'd be a valuable man for any outfit," Phil Droten declared. "If you happen to be a little short of money——" He started to reach for a pocket.

"No, thanks!" Old Cy said, putting his hand up in swift protest. "I sure appreciate the offer, though. It makes me a friend o' yours. Most men don't appreciate my friendship, I reckon, thinkin' that it ain't worth much, me bein' a no-account nobody. But you never c'n tell, boy."

"Then I'll buy you a drink," Droten said.

"I was jus' goin' to get me one. I'm heeled with coin. I've got a dollar—washed dishes for the Chinaman for a dollar and some grub."

"Keep your dollar. This one is on me. W've both got trail dust in our throats somethin' terrible, and there's only one remedy for that. Let's get to the bar."

It was a lot easier, however, expressing the wish than carrying it to fulfillment. Men were standing three deep in front of the bar, but it was an orderly crowd. Phil Droten, in quite an expert manner, elbowed his way to the front, and Old Cy managed to keep at his heels.

But they met with disaster when they finally reached the bar, for Old Cy found himself compelled to lurch heavily against another man. And this man happened to be Hugh Fraysig.

Fraysig turned angrily, his self-importance ruffled. "Hey, you!" he exclaimed. "Who are you givin' the elbow to? Oh! It's you, is it, you old crowbait? I saw you on the trail, didn't I? Well, keep your dirty paws off me! Get out of the way and let gentlemen have the room you're takin' up!"

He thrust Old Cy backward as he finished speaking—and found himself confronted by young Phil Droten.

"You go easy with that stuff!" Droten warned him. "You don't run the earth, I reckon, whoever you are. This old gentleman is my guest just now, and he's to be treated as such. If there's any shovin' around to be done, try it on me!"

"So this old range tramp is your guest, is he?" Hugh Fraysig asked.

"This old gentleman, I said," Phil Droten corrected. "And I aim to see that my guests aren't mistreated!"

"And who are you?" Fraysig inquired with a sneer.

"My name is Phil Droten. I'm a stranger in your thrivin' little city," the other replied.

"Waste o' time and talk to tell us that. If you wasn't a stranger around here, you'd know better than to bluster up to me. I'm Fraysig, of the F Bar G!"

"Yeh? Puncher or ranch cook?" Droten asked easily.

Some man in the crowd snickered. Hugh Fraysig's face flushed. "I happen to own the outfit," he said with some dignity.

"Oh! F Bar G, you say? I never heard tell of it," Droten declared. "Have you got your brand registered proper, and everything like that? I hope that you have good luck and make a go of your little ranch, Fraysig. I always like to see men step out for themselves and get along."

"Why, cuss your hide!" Hugh Fraysig cried, sputtering his rage. He fondly imagined that the F Bar G was well and favorably known the length and breadth of the land. "You're pretty fresh for a stranger, it seems to me. Who are you, and what are you doin' in this part of the country?"

"The name is Droten," Phil said, "as I remarked before. I came from Texas, if it's any of your business, which it isn't. I'm a puncher, and am lookin' for a job hereabouts. Any other information on request. Nothin' to hide. Now you get out of the way and let this old gentleman step up to the bar where he belongs!"

"You—you dare to talk to me like this?" Fraysig raged. Why, you——"

His move of the right hand was swift, and yet far too slow; for, as his fingers touched the flap of his holster, he felt the muzzle of a gun against him. He found two eyes boring into his. And he heard a cold voice speaking in a staccato monotone:

"Try to draw that gun, and I'll blow you to bits!"

Men immediately scattered out of every possible line of fire. And there was suddenly ample room at the bar. George Ramberg, standing just behind his boss, uttered an exclamation and allowed his hand to stray toward his own six-gun. But Phil Droten flashed him a look, and he desisted.

Hugh Fraysig's face had turned white for an instant. Now it suddenly was purple with wrath.

"You — you——" he stammered. "You started wrong in this town, Droten! You'd better ride on, out of Sunglare! Stay here, and I'll get you for this!"

"Try it!" Droten told him.

"My hand's raised against you, Droten! You can't get a job on this range!"

Another man stepped quickly up to the bar.

"Don't let that remark worry you any, Droten," he said. "I happen to need a good man right now, and I'll give you a job. Usual pay. You're hired!"

"Thanks!" Droten said, smiling, but keeping his eyes on Fraysig and not even glancing at the man who had addressed him. "Would you mind tellin' me what outfit I'm workin' for?"

"I'm Sam Vonner, foreman of the Circle P. That's the outfit you're workin' for, Droten. And half a dozen of our boys are right here now to back me up—and back you up, too—if this Mr. Fraysig don't behave himself and make his men behave. The Circle P boys stand together."

Fraysig saw a chance to turn the argument away from Droten and possibly "save his face" before the crowd.

"Vonner!" he exclaimed. "I won't stand much more stuff like this from you and the Circle P gang! Tryin' hard to reopen the old range war, aren't you? And everybody knows why, of course. I like to drop over to the Circle P for a visit once in a while. And you'd like to fix it so that I couldn't wouldn't you?"

Everybody who heard him knew his meaning. Fraysig visited Nancy Plake now and then. And Sam Vonner was also a suitor. So anything that would remove Fraysig from the field would be welcome to Vonner. If the old war broke out, naturally Fraysig would have to cease his visits; and Nancy Plake would also be prejudiced against her outfit's chief enemy.

"Fraysig!" Vonner warned.

"Perhaps the little lady——" Fraysig began.

The mere hint of Nancy Plake in such a place, at such a time, and before such an audience, was enough to stamp Hugh Fraysig the cad. Men of every outfit save his own were infuriated, for Nancy Plake, as the stableman had told Droten, was the idol of the range. It enraged Sam Vonner to such an extent that he forgot his usual caution. And his empty hands went up and out, as though he would clutch Hugh Fraysig by the throat.

It was the move for which Fraysig had been hoping. Droten had stepped to one side, while Fraysig had a big advantage over Vonner, for Vonner's hands now were far from his six-gun, and in a position from which he could not make a quick draw. Fraysig could beat him to the draw now, hold a gun on him, have the last word in an argument, and possibly regain his lost prestige with the crowd. Once more he reached for his six-gun.

And once more he felt the muzzle of Phil Droten's weapon pressed against his body.

"I told you not to draw that gun, Fraysig!" Phil Droten said. "You won't go to shootin' down my foreman before he's had time to write my name in the time book. No, sir! Circle P men stand together!"

CHAPTER IV.

DROTEN PLAYS HERO.

IN the sudden silence in the room, Hugh Fraysig stood like a man turned to stone. Sam Vonner's attack had been diverted by Droten's quick move. The foreman's rage died in a measure; enough, at least, to enable him to regain control of himself.

Fraysig was doing some quick thinking. The Circle P men had the upper hand for a moment. To keep his standing with the men who had heard and seen, he would have to act quickly. Since that action could not be physical without his getting the worst of it, it had to be mental.

"So!" Fraysig said, breathing heavily. "It is quite a nice, little plot, but I refuse to help it work."

"What do you mean?" Vonner demanded.

"Isn't it plain enough?" Fraysig countered. "Who is this stranger who came into the Mansion and deliberately picked a quarrel with me? And why are you so quick to back him up, pretending to give him a job on the Circle P? It wouldn't be the first time, Vonner, that a gunman was imported to help in a range war."

"I never saw this man until a few minutes ago," Vonner declared. "I wouldn't have thought of offerin' him a job if you hadn't shot off your mouth, sayin' nobody would give him one because your hand was against him."

"That is what you say, Vonner."

"You callin' me a liar?" Vonner cried.

"Your gunman has the muzzle of a revolver jammed against me, so you can go right ahead and bluster," Fraysig said. "You F Bar G men keep your hands off your guns! We won't walk into the trap."

"What trap are you talkin' about?" Vonner demanded.

"Do you think I'm blind?" Fraysig asked. "You're tryin' your best to make the old war break out here to-day. Well, I and my men won't accommodate you. If there's any trouble, the Circle P will start it. And I'll see to it that the Circle P's owner knows that, too!"

"You started the fuss yourself, Fraysig, by bumpin' my old friend out of the way and then tryin' to go for your gun," Phil Droten informed him. "The foreman's right—he never saw me until a few minutes ago. Never heard of me, either. Didn't know I was comin' to Sunglare. Now if you want to call me a liar, I'll put my gun back in my holster, step back ten feet, and start even with you!"

"As far as you're concerned, we'll probably meet again," Fraysig said.

"My address will be the Circle P," Droten told him. "Any time you want to see me, send the word!"

Hugh Fraysig glared at them for a moment, and then deliberately turned his back. He knew that he was safe in doing so, for the Circle P boys were not the kind to attack from behind. He walked along the bar, George Ramberg following him, and beckoned to the other F Bar G men.

"That's that!" Droten said. "Now we'll have our drink. Is it against the law here for a man to buy his foreman a drink, Vonner?"

"I don't drink much," Vonner replied, "but I'll certainly take one with you, since you're a new Circle P man. What's your old friend's name?"

"My name's Cyrus Wapper, but I ain't known him for long," said Old Cy. "Howsomever, I'm glad that I've known him that long."

"You mean it about the job?" Droten asked.

"Sure!" Vonner replied. "I really do need a man, and you're my kind of man, I judge."

"Then I'm hired. I've got my hoss in the livery stable."

"You'll ride out with us when we go."

"Fine! How about Cy Wapper, here? Can you give him a job? I haven't known him but about twenty minutes, but I reckon that I can vouch for him."

Old Cy braced himself. "Puncher for more'n forty years," he said. "Sickness and bad luck put me down. But give me right grub for a couple o' weeks, and I c'n hold up my end with the boys."

Sam Vonner looked him over closely. He seemed to ignore the rags and tatters and go more on the countenance.

"Tell you what I'll do," Vonner said. "I'll give you a bunk and all the grub you can stow away. You split wood and carry water for the cook and do odd jobs for a month. End of that time, I can give you a reg'lar job."

"That suits me fine!" Old Cy said, his faded eyes lighting up. "I'm right down grateful."

They took their drinks. Droten and Old Cy refused a second.

"I want you to meet a couple of the boys," Vonner said, beckoning to two punchers standing a few feet away. "This here ugly man is Hank Snikes. He's the bunk-house pest."

Hank Snikes was tall and angular, with a welcoming smile. He was the cool, nerveless sort that could be depended upon in a fight.

"And this is Billy Lorn, the ranch dude when he's all dressed up," Sam Vonner added.

Billy Lorn was young and small. Whereas Hank Snikes would bring into battle a cool courage and steadiness, Billy Lorn was the sort to shine through impulse and daring.

"Now I've got some business to 'tend to in the store," the foreman said. "You boys keep out of trouble. We'll get together before we go back to the ranch. Keep your eyes peeled for Fraysig. For certain reasons, at which he hinted, he ain't eager to reopen the old fight. But Fraysig, or some of his men, might take a notion to get a Circle P boy when he ain't lookin'."

Phil Droten.

"Leave it to us, boss!" Droten said.

"And you, Wapper!" The foreman continued.

"Call me Old Cy," Wapper instructed.

"All right, Cy! I took a look at that horse of yours—saw you when you rode in. You take him down to the livery stable and see that he has a first-rate feed. Tell 'em to charge it to the ranch. Get him in condition for the trip to the Circle P. You c'n turn him out to grass there for a few weeks and let him get good again."

Vonner hurried away, and the others turned back to the bar. Billy Lorn bought the round of drinks to cement the new acquaintanceship. Then Droten and Old Cy wandered out into the street, Old Cy to get his horse and do as the foreman commanded.

"I feel almost like cryin'," Old Cy said. "I'm goin' to have a home again.

I'll sure split all the wood and carry all the water on the danged ranch! I'll get fed up, and my horse'll get fed up. And I—I got you to thank for it!"

"You see here!" Droten commanded. "Two drinks make you that maudlin?"

"It ain't the drinks. I mean it. Man, I—I ain't had plenty to eat for a long time."

"You take that hoss to the stable, like the foreman told you," Droten ordered. "You tell that stableman that I've hired out to the Circle P, too, and that I'll want my hoss when the bunch rides out. I'll drift down to the stable later and meet you. And call me Phil."

"Thanks—Phil!" Old Cy answered.

"And I'm tellin' you somethin' right here and now, old-timer! You're workin' for a good outfit now, and it's got a young lady boss. And how do you look? I'm goin' to buy you a few shirts and a couple pair of overalls——"

"Now, Phil!" Old Cy protested.

"Shut up! And some handkerchiefs. Likewise several plugs of chewin', several sacks of smokin'. And I'll stake you to a pair of new boots and some socks. You c'n pay me back some time next year when you start drawin' wages. You sputter at me now, Cy, and I'll smash you one! I got you your job, didn't I? Then I'm your manager. Get goin', now!"

Phil Droten cut off the old man's shower of thanks and turned down the street. "Poor old boy!" he muttered, as Old Cy started to ride toward the stable. "Don't know why I'm lookin' out for him. Jus' struck my fancy, I reckon. Maybe there's some reason for it, that I don't know anything about."

He manufactured a cigarette, as he stood back from the jostling crowd. And once more the expression on his face indicated that he was deep in thought. He glanced up and down the crowded street, locating the restaurant, the general store, the bank. The latter was a little brick building almost across the street from the livery stable, the only brick building that Sunglare boasted.

More than roistering punchers had come to town for pay day. There were ranch wagons scattered around, with unhitched horses munching grain from the ends of them. Women and children were scattered through the crowd, healthy, out-of-doors women and children who seemed prosperous and jovial. The general store was the center of a hectic trading spree for this one day.

Droten decided that he might as well go to the general store and purchase the supplies he had promised Old Cy. And also he wanted to get a few things for himself. The crowd in the street was thinning as the punchers made their way into The Mansion and kindred resorts. Perhaps, he thought, he could manage now to get waited on at the store within a moderate limit of time.

He stepped down from the warped plank sidewalk, to cross the street to the store, when, above the hum of conversation and the pounding of men's boots upon the walks, came a new series of sounds. Men commenced shouting. There was the thunder of hoofs. And human beings scattered from the street to the walks and dived through open doorways.

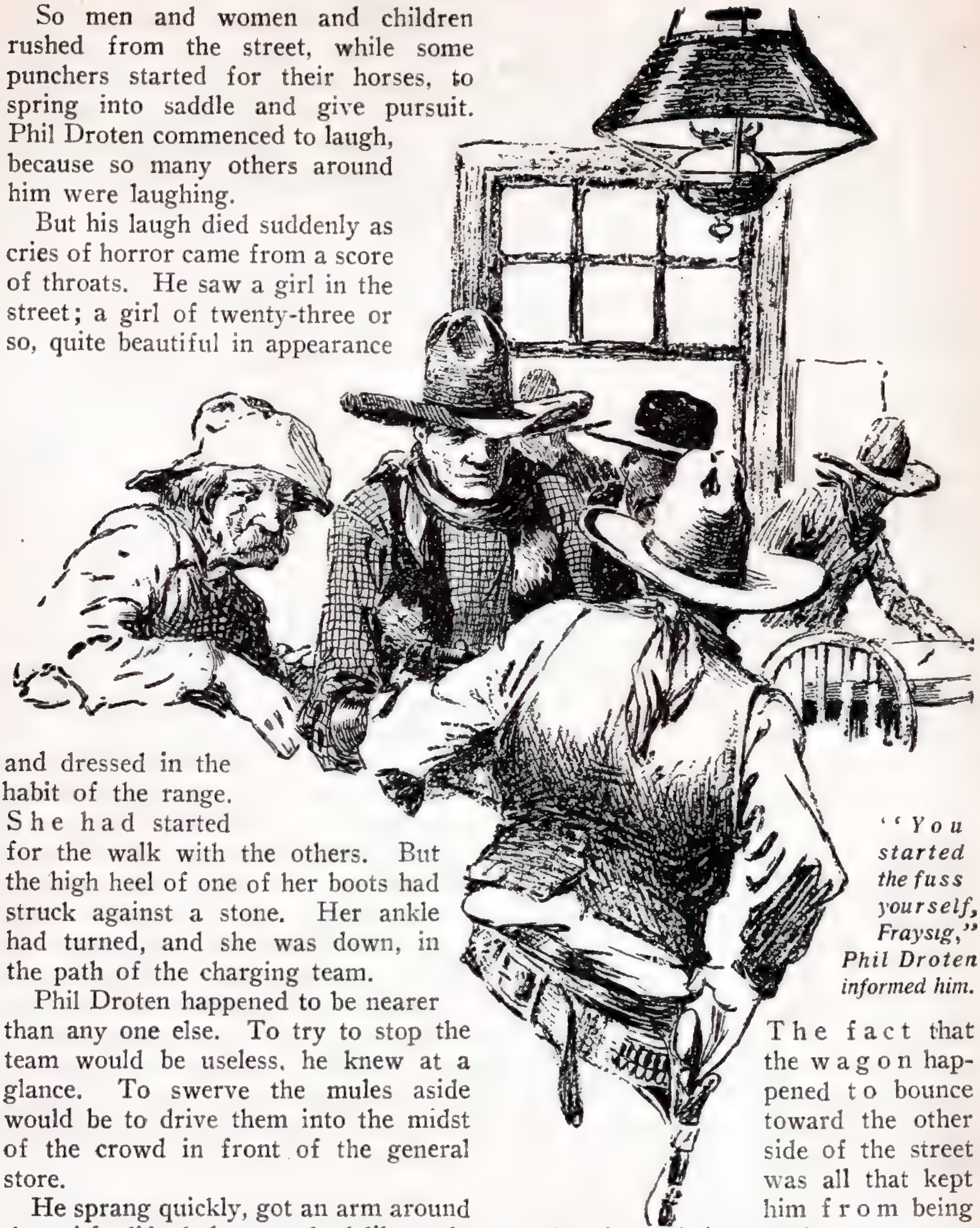
Phil Droten looked swiftly down the street. Along it came a raging team of mules drawing a light wagon. The reins were flying in the air, the wagon swaying from side to side. Nostrils dilated and eyes wide, the frightened animals charged the length of the street.

"Runaway! Runaway!" the punchers were shouting.

It would have been folly to attempt to stop the team in the narrow street. The best policy was to get out of their way and let them run, for shortly they would be past the buildings and on the trail. Then, they could be overtaken and stopped.

So men and women and children rushed from the street, while some punchers started for their horses, to spring into saddle and give pursuit. Phil Droten commenced to laugh, because so many others around him were laughing.

But his laugh died suddenly as cries of horror came from a score of throats. He saw a girl in the street; a girl of twenty-three or so, quite beautiful in appearance and dressed in the habit of the range. She had started for the walk with the others. But the high heel of one of her boots had struck against a stone. Her ankle had turned, and she was down, in the path of the charging team.



"You started the fuss yourself, Fraysig," Phil Droten informed him.

Phil Droten happened to be nearer than any one else. To try to stop the team would be useless, he knew at a glance. To swerve the mules aside would be to drive them into the midst of the crowd in front of the general store.

He sprang quickly, got an arm around the girl, lifted her, and deliberately hurled her toward the sidewalk, and into the arms of a group of men there. Then, he lost his balance, and was prone himself. But Droten did not try to get up, for he knew he would not have time. Over and over he rolled in the dust, toward the walk. And the hoofs of the nearest mule missed his head by inches. The fact that the wagon happened to bounce toward the other side of the street was all that kept him from being crushed beneath its wheels.

Then the runaway was gone, with the riders after it. Phil Droten sprang to his feet, glanced down at himself, and laughed. He did not look like a dude puncher now, for his neckerchief was torn, and his shirt. His chaps were awry. And he was covered with dust from head to foot.

Men rushed to his side, questions bubbling from their lips.

"I'm all right!" he said. "Not a scratch. Did I hurt the girl?"

Suddenly he found the girl at his side. "I want to thank you," she said.

"I'm right sorry that I had to throw you around so roughly," Droten said, smiling down at her.

"Perhaps it is a good thing for me that you did," she replied. "I don't seem to remember you. Have I met you before?"

"I'm sorry to say that you haven't."

"What outfit do you work for?" she inquired.

"My name is Phil Droten. And I'm a Circle P man," he replied.

"You're a Circle P man!" she exclaimed, looking at him peculiarly. "That is rather funny! You see, I am Nancy Plake. I own the Circle P. And I don't remember of ever seeing you around the place!"

CHAPTER V.

A WORRIED HEIRESS.

PHIL DROTEN laughed lightly as he looked down at her. With her flushed face and disheveled hair added to her natural attractiveness, she presented a pretty picture.

"I reckon that you are somewhat surprised," Droten said. "As a matter o' fact, I haven't been a Circle P man for more'n half an hour. Your foreman, Mr. Sam Vonner, just hired me. And since it was on the cards for me to help a lady, I'm right down glad that the lady was my boss!"

"So am I, Mr. Droten," Nancy Plake declared laughing also. "Glad to welcome you to the Circle P. I'm sure that you'll make a good man for the outfit."

Sam Vonner came hurrying up at that moment for he had seen what had happened, but had been some distance away.

"Nancy!" he cried. "You're not hurt? That's fine! Droten, all of us are sure obliged to you."

"Glad that I happened to be on the spot," Droten said. He glanced down at his torn and dust-stained garments again. "If you'll excuse me, I'll go clean up a bit," he added. "Right at this minute I'm not the neat cowpuncher that a Circle P man ought to be. I look like somethin' that had been kicked around the corral."

"One moment, please," Nancy Plake said. She faced her foreman while Droten waited. "Sam, I want you to come to the bank with me," she added. "We'll be busy there for half an hour or so. And I want all the boys to get together and ride back to the ranch—in half an hour. Have some one find them and spread the word while you're with me."

"Ride back to the ranch?" Vonner asked in surprise. "Why—on pay day too——"

"I know," she interrupted. "I hate to spoil their little pay-day spree. But in return I'll let them break a ranch rule this once. They can take a moderate amount of liquor with them back to the ranch, if they must have it, and then have their pay-day party in the bunk house to-night. They'll have liquor, and cards, and their phonograph. And, perhaps, I'll go down to the bunk house and dance once with each of them, if that will be any inducement."

"But, Nancy, I don't understand," Vonner protested.

"Things are just ripe for a range war, and we are not going to start one," she said firmly. "I've heard rumors, Sam. But I do not believe that Hugh Fraysig will start a war, and I'm not going to let the Circle P begin hostilities. If the boys stay in town, and happen to drink too much, some Circle P man and some F Bar G puncher are going to mix; and five minutes later everybody in both outfits will be in it."

FAR WEST 1

"All right!" the foreman agreed. "You're the boss. Droten, go and clean up, and then find Billy Lorn and Hank Snikes and tell them. Say that I said for them to tell the other boys—you haven't met 'em yet. Get your horses and be at the bank in half an hour, ready to ride. And tell them what Miss Nancy said about the liquor, too."

"Yes, sir," Droten replied. He touched his hat to Nancy Plake, and turned and hurried away. The episode of the runaway team had attracted the attention of the pay-day crowd to him. It was being whispered around, also, that he had made Hugh Fraysig mind him. So already, Phil Droten was better known in Sunglare than some men might have been after a month's residence.

Sam Vonner walked with Nancy along the thronged street and toward the little brick bank building. Nancy was hurrying as much as she could, but everybody knew her; and she had to answer those who greeted her and congratulated her on her escape. But finally they came to the bank building and, going up the steps, passed through a door in a partition to a little rear room.

Slender, bald, oily James Tragman came there to them, with a crafty smile upon his face. His hackneyed compliments were hushed when Nancy raised her hand, for there was something very commanding in the owner of the Circle P when she wished to reveal it. She could be altogether feminine at times, and entirely serious and businesslike at others.

"I've looked over the statements you sent out to me, Mr. Tragman," she said. "I've spent considerable time in studying them."

"I assume that they were all right," Tragman told her. "Dry figures never should bother such a pretty head."

"Putting aside the pretty part, they do bother my head some," she replied. "I thought that I understood figures pretty well. I have been to school, you know, and I kept books for dad all the time that he was sick, and for a couple of years before that."

"What am I to understand?" Tragman asked. The banker looked a bit worried, and glanced at Sam Vonner; but the expression on Vonner's face said plainly that the foreman did not know what it was all about.

"My father was helpless for two years before he died," Nancy said. "And for the last year and a half of that time he didn't pay any attention to business—he wasn't able. He allowed you to attend to the financial end, Mr. Tragman, and let Sam run the ranch."

"A splendid arrangement!" Tragman declared.

"I didn't pay much attention to the business, either, for I was so worried about dad. But he's gone now, and we have to get down to worldly things. So I've been comparing statements."

"I am quite sure that I don't understand," Tragman told her. "Are you dissatisfied with the manner in which Mr. Vonner and myself are attending to your affairs?"

"Frankly, I am," she replied. "The last two years have been good years—yet our beef deliveries have fallen off each time. The herds have been decreasing."

"There's been some rustlin' back in the hills, Nancy," Vonner said.

"Yes—some," she said. "But the rustlers don't account for all the missing stock."

"Allow me to point out that your place adjoins the F Bar G," said the banker.

"Would you say that in front of Hugh Fraysig—hinting as you are that the F Bar G outfit might have something to do with my decreasing herds?" Nancy asked.

"I am not attending to Fraysig's business," Tragman said, stiffly. "I am attending to yours, at the request of your father."

"Yes. My father asked you and Sam to do that, until——"

"Until what?" Vonner asked, as she hesitated.

"Well, I'll tell you," she answered. "My father wasn't satisfied with the way things were going. He was helpless, but he didn't like the ranch reports, nor his financial reports. He seemed to think that you were not getting him financial arrangements as satisfactory as usual, Mr. Tragman."

"My dear young lady! I did not want to bother your father continually when he was so ill," said Tragman. "The money market fluctuates."

"Certainly," she agreed. "But dad thought loans could be carried at a better rate. The way you handled it, he paid a high rate for money, but when the cash was in, and you invested for him, we got a very low rate. Then the shipments were not as good as he had expected."

"We have a bad year now and then," Vonner put in.

"We've had plenty of water and grass the last year and a half," she declared. "Conditions have been such that the shipments should have been larger instead of smaller. And we didn't get top prices for our beef, either."

Vonner and the banker exchanged glances.

"It seems to me, my dear, that you are accusing Vonner and me of not looking out for your interests," Tragman purred.

"I am making no accusations."

"Your father trusted us, Miss Plake."

"Not altogether. He was helpless and had to trust somebody. Sam had been his foreman for several years and knew the ranch and range and had been a good man. And he had known you for a long time, Mr. Tragman."

"Business cares should not rest on pretty shoulders," the banker told her to change the subject.

"But sometimes they do," she answered. "And then what are you going to do about it?"

"You intimated that Mr. Vonner and I were to manage your affairs until—something. What was that?" the banker asked.

"Oh, yes! If you'll remember, dad took a sudden turn for the worse. He had made certain arrangements, but was afraid that he would die before he could complete what he wished to do. So he told me the story, so I'd know, in case he—he died too soon. And he—did," was Nancy's reply.

A spasm of pain crossed her face, and for a moment she was silent. Nancy Plake was an only child, and she had loved her father devotedly.

"When dad was young, he had two pals," she continued. "I do not even know their names. The three of them were rather wild, down along the Mexican border. They saved each other's lives, and all that, and formed one of those three-cornered friendships that we do not see often enough."

"Interesting," Tragman commented, glancing at Sam Vonner again.

"They all swore that they would answer if one of them ever needed help," Nancy went on. "For they separated, of course. Dad came up here, met mother and married, and built up the Circle P. His two friends went elsewhere."

"But what has all this——" Vonner commenced.

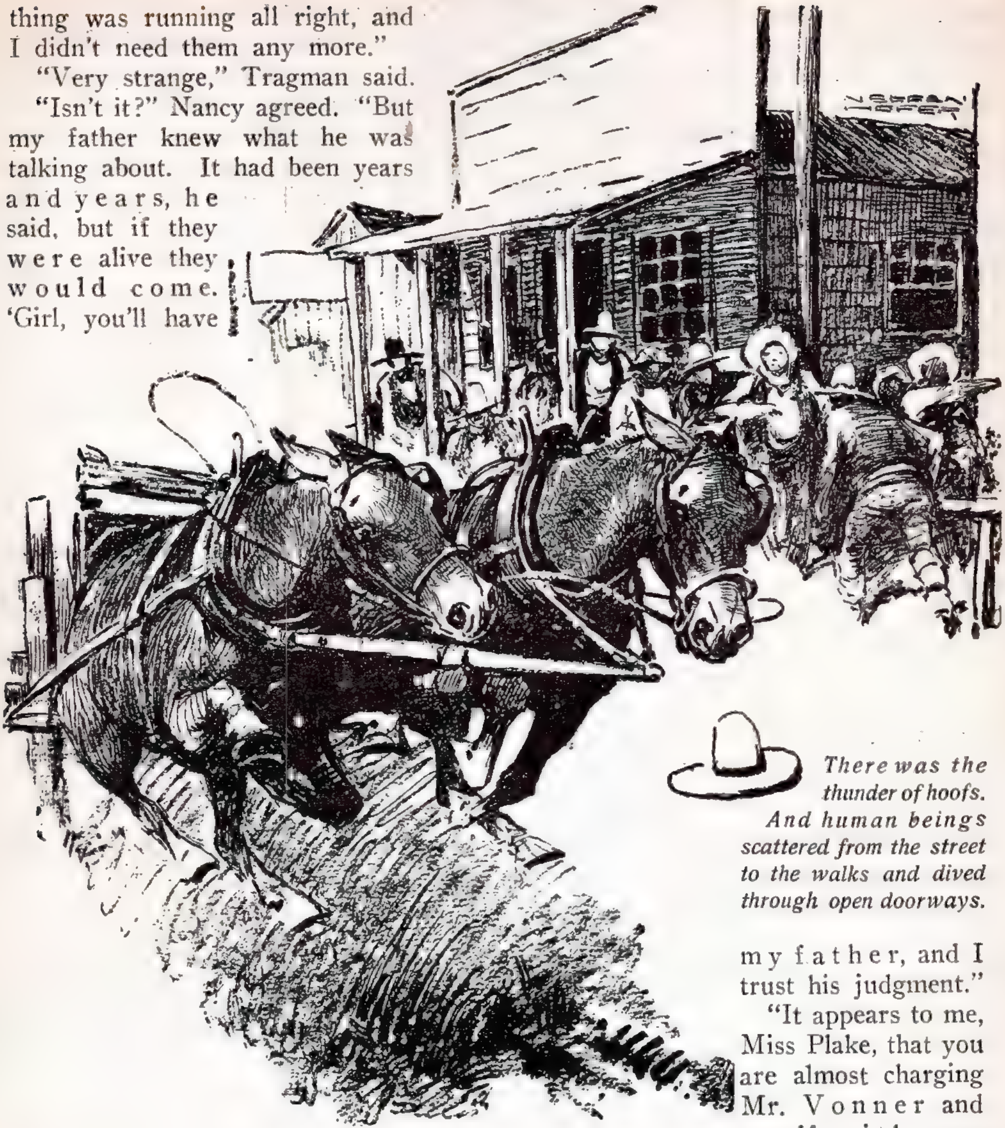
"Wait, Sam, until I explain," she interrupted. "Dad thought that there was something wrong. A week before he died he wrote two letters, and sent them to some one to forward to his two old friends. He said that he was dying and leaving his daughter all alone. And he asked his two old friends to come here, and be fathers to me until everything was running all right, and I didn't need them any more."

"Very strange," Tragman said.

"Isn't it?" Nancy agreed. "But my father knew what he was talking about. It had been years and years, he said, but if they were alive they would come. 'Girl, you'll have two fathers to fight for you, if you need them,' he told me."

"But you do not need them," Tragman said. "Do you mean to say that if these unknown men show up, you'll give over to them the handling of your affairs?"

"Certainly, if I think it necessary," she replied promptly. "I've never seen them. Dad didn't get a chance to tell me more. He—he died suddenly one evening, you'll remember. But I knew my father, and I trust his judgment."



There was the thunder of hoofs. And human beings scattered from the street to the walks and dived through open doorways.

"It appears to me, Miss Plake, that you are almost charging Mr. Vonner and myself with some sort of dishonesty," the banker said. "You would be foolish to put your affairs in the hands of utter strangers. Years have passed, as you said. These old friends of your father's may have changed with the years, and may not be the great friends he believed them to be. They may have turned into scoundrels!"

"I'll trust dad's judgment, I said," was Nancy's reply. "I feel that there is something wrong. I—I need help—outside help. I want to be sure. If you and Sam have done the best for me, then I'm more than glad, and you'll be rewarded. And if you have, you'll not be afraid of any investigation these old friends of my father's might make."

"Certainly we fear no investigation," Tragman said quickly. "But we do not want you to make a foolish move, Miss Plake, and I do not see the necessity for all of this. Your father had been sick for a long time, and while I do not say that his mind was affected——"

"It certainly was not affected!" she snapped. "I am the only heir, and the court has placed matters in my hands. Thank Heaven, dad did not appoint you and Sam executors! Not that I mean to say you'd do a dishonest thing. Only —well, I'd rather not have my hands tied."

"You are making a mountain out of a molehill," said the banker.

"But," said Nancy, "what do the books show? You leased grazing privileges for almost half of what you got before. You lent our money at cheap rates, and borrowed for us at high rates when we needed it. Cattle have been mysteriously missing. We've got poor prices for good beef. Maybe, it is all right but I'll be glad to have my fighting fathers, as dad called them, investigate for me. If everything is all right, they'll tell me so."

"I'm quite sure that they'll find everything all right," the banker said. "If you are dissatisfied with the way I have been handling your affairs, I'll gladly withdraw from the management of them."

"Please—not until the investigation," she told him firmly. "I have to contend with so much! Hugh Fraysig wants me to marry him, but only to get my ranch, of course. I try to be friendly because he is a neighbor, but I rather despise him."

"I should think so!" Tragman said.

"And Sam, too, has been bothering me——"

"Nancy!" Vonner cried. "I've thought a lot of you for a long time. And I'm not ashamed of it. Sure I want to marry you! Why not? I was your dad's foreman, and I certainly could run the ranch to suit you."

"This is scarcely the time or place for a proposal, Sam," she said. "And you may as well get such an idea out of your head. When I marry, it'll not be to get a man to run my ranch."

"And these—er—'fighting fathers,' as you call them," Tragman hurried to say. "You have said that you do not even know their names."

"Dad meant to tell me, but he waited too long. I do not know what he wrote in the letters to them. He did not know exactly where they were, for they are wanderers. And he said he had heard of neither of them for almost a year. But he sent the letters to another man who did know where they were," Nancy said.

"Girl!" Tragman cried. "How do you know that impostors will not come here and represent themselves to be your father's old friends? They'll try to win your confidence, and possibly swindle you."

She smiled at them enigmatically. "I am not a bit afraid of impostors, Mr. Tragman," she replied. "I'll know the real men if they come, for I have a sure way of knowing. My dad told me how they would identify themselves to me."

CHAPTER VI.

CONSPIRATORS.

NANCY PLAKE got up from her chair as an indication that the conference was at an end. She was glad that it was over, for it had not been at all pleasant. But she had felt it to be necessary.

"I must go to the store, Sam, and then I'll be ready to ride back to the ranch," she told her foreman. "Please corral all the boys, so that they can return with us."

"I'll check up on the pay roll with Mr. Tragman, and then I'll be through," Sam Vonner told her. "I'm afraid, though, that the boys won't like it because you're makin' them leave town so early. And I reckon that you'll have to make good on your promise to dance with them in the bunk house tonight."

Sam Vonner was smiling at Nancy as Tragman ushered her into the outer room; but he did not feel like smiling, and did it only as a matter of policy. He was pleasant enough while she was departing; but the instant she was out of sight his smile fled, and his face became as a thundercloud. Tragman came back into the little room.

"And now what?" the banker demanded. "What has made her suspicious all of a sudden? And what's all this stuff about some fighting fathers coming to help her?"

"I don't know a bit more about it than you do, Tragman!" Sam Vonner replied.

"And I don't know anything about it at all," the banker replied.

"Nancy Plake ain't exactly a fool, Tragman. And we've put over some mighty raw deals," Sam reminded him.

"So you've been trying to marry her, have you?" the banker asked.

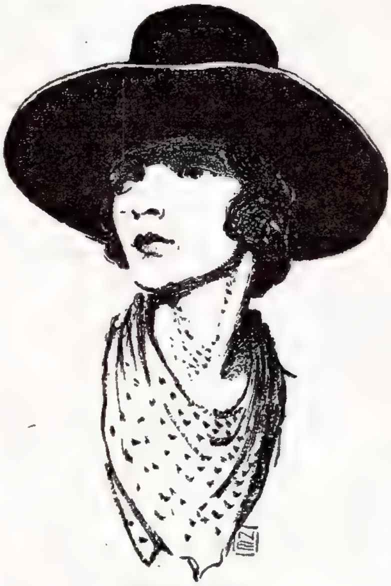
"Yeh! And why not? The Circle P is a right nice little piece of property, even if——"

"Even if it be well looted before you married the owner," Tragman said, his lips curling a bit. "I suppose you planned to turn the tables on me after the marriage, kick me out of our partnership. But it's too late to think of that now, Sam. It appears to me that we've got to make some fast moves."

"She may be guessin' at a lot," the foreman said. "But what does she actually know?"

"Nothing, my dear Mr. Sam Vonner! But these mysterious fathers of whom she speaks may be men capable of finding out things."

"Yeh? Maybe they can be taken care of if they show up," Sam suggested.


Nancy Plake.

"Shot down, you mean?" the banker asked. "That is not a very clever way of solving the problem. They may be gentlemen of some importance. And Sheriff Bill Mattise doesn't love either of us any too much, please remember."

"Well, I've lost out with the girl," Vonner admitted. "I knew that before she told me just now. I might as well give up all idea of marryin' her and gettin' my hands on the ranch that way. And, if there's really somebody comin' here to investigate, we'd better get busy coverin' our tracks."

James Tragman sighed and lit a cigar. "It was pretty while it lasted," he said. "We lent Circle P money at the usual rate, reported a lower one, and pocketed the difference. We borrowed for the Circle P at the usual rate when the outfit needed quick cash, reported a higher rate, and kept the profit for ourselves. I leased grazing privileges to some of my friends a little under the market, reported a still lower price, and we cleaned up there. That was my share of the deal. But good things never last."

"You couldn't have done it without my consent—without takin' me in," Sam Vonner said. "And how about my share of the work?"

"Oh, you did your share, Sam!" the banker acknowledged.

"I reckon!" said Sam. "No wonder that she thinks the beef herds have been small. A crooked cattle buyer comes in handy at times. We sell a thousand and report five hundred, credit the outfit with five hundred at poor prices, and split the value of the other five hundred with the buyer. Yeh, it's been great while it lasted! And we ain't had to grease only a few palms. But certain men know too much, Tragman. Hank Snikes, for instance."

"What about Hank?" the banker asked.

"He's been gettin' out o' hand lately. He knows entirely too much," Vonner said. "He makes demands on me whenever he feels like it, and I've got to do as he says. He'll be startin' in on you next."

James Tragman looked thoughtful as he sank back in his chair. He put his finger tips together in front of him, and wrinkled his brow in thought.

"It appears to me, Sam, that we've about reached the end of the rope, as the saying is," the banker said, after a time. "We've taken all the cream and some of the milk; and the only thing remaining is to make certain that we're not bothered about it."

"You got anything to suggest?" Sam Vonner wanted to know. "Maybe we've been too careless. We commenced tappin' the outfit while Plake was still alive, remember. We're wide open, Tragman! But who in blue blazes thought that we'd ever have anybody to deal with except the girl? And we figured that she'd trust both of us. We never thought that somebody would come around her investigatin'."

"Sam, we are certainly a pair of precious scoundrels, robbing a young woman," Tragman declared, chuckling a bit. "But I found out years ago that it generally pays a man to look out for his own interests. And she'll probably marry some handsome no-account, and he'll get everything she has. So why not take it for ourselves, while the picking is good? That's the way I looked at it."

"Yeh! But I sure don't want everything to come to light now, Tragman!" the foreman remarked.

"No more do I, Sam. Could a man in my position—a banker—last very long if such things were known of him? Vonner, I have an idea! An army officer once told me that some army outfits carry on their books a lot of missing government property, carry it that way maybe for years, each company commander winking and passing on the deficit to another when transferred."

"What in blazes——" the other tried to interrupt.

"Wait, Sam! I haven't finished," Tragman continued. "And then, the first time this outfit gets into a fight, all their missing stuff is written off the books. They've got their chance to get square then. Whoever happens to be in charge of the outfit merely reports the missing stuff lost in action. That explains everything and clears the books, Sam—lost in action."

"Tragman, I don't see——" Sam began.

But the other interrupted him, "Think, Sam! Use your brains! That would clear everything—lost in action. Therefore, we must have some action, Sam."

"Why don't you talk sense!" the foreman protested.

"In other words, my dear Mr. Samuel Vonner," Tragman continued, "the old range war between the Circle P and the F Bar G outfits must break out again. Then, everything will be in a mess. An accident might happen to Mr. Hank

Snikes during the war, for instance, because he knows too much—also to other gentlemen who know too much."

"I got it!" Sam Vonner said, his eyes glistening.

"And people always lose their heads when there is a war, Sam," the other continued. "And many wild rumors circulate. Would it be extremely difficult to lead everybody to believe that possibly the F Bar G outfit is responsible for Miss Nancy Plake's dwindling herds? Lost in action, Sam!"

"You've got it!" Vonner exclaimed. "A range war right now would cover our tracks."

"Exactly! We've got ours. And by the time the fuss is over, everybody will cease suspecting us. All suspicion can be thrown toward the F Bar G. Neither of us loves Hugh Fraysig, and this will give us the chance to square accounts with him, too. And it might even be whispered, Sam, that Fraysig started the war himself because Nancy refused to marry him. Everybody on the range knows that he has been after her."

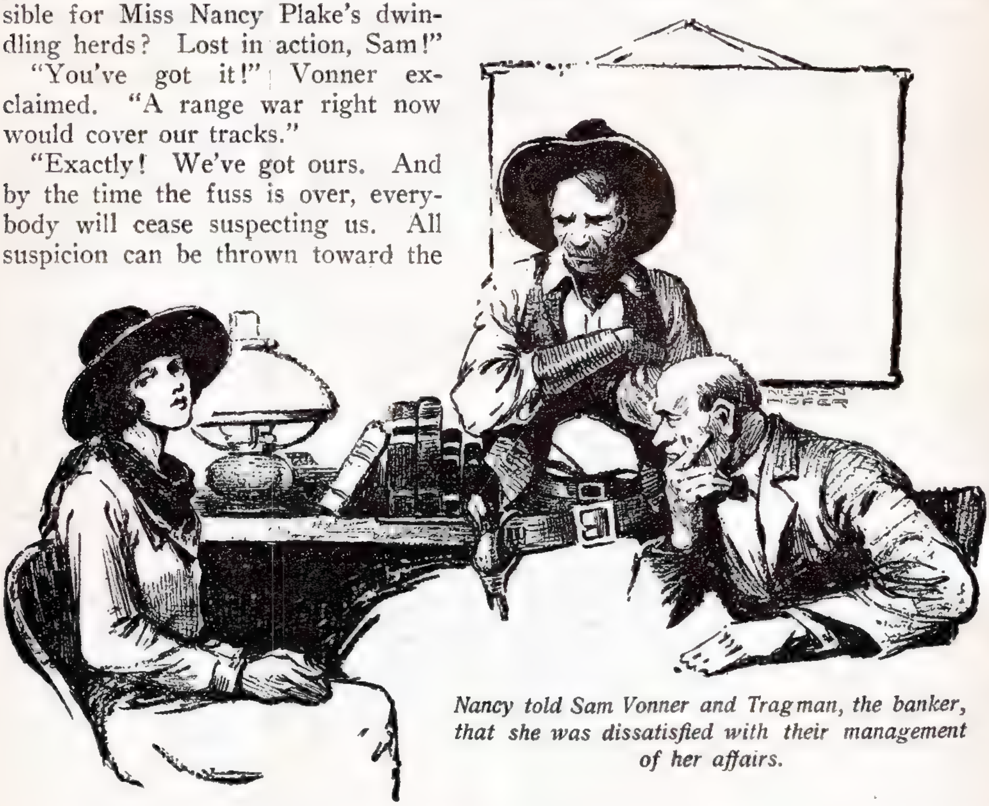
"That's it!" Vonner declared, excitement in his manner. "And it sure and certain can be done, Tragman, in spite o' the fact that Fraysig thinks I'm tryin' to start a fuss and is tryin' to dodge one."

"All right, Sam. You start your little war, and keep it going good and hot. And I'll commence doctoring the books and sweeping smooth the footprints in the sands, so to speak. That's the program, Sam," stated the banker.

"It'll be easy, Tragman," the other replied. "I hired a new man to-day, a young firebrand from Texas, named Phil Droten. About the first thing he did after gettin' into town was to draw a gun on Fraysig and back him up against the bar in The Mansion. And Fraysig has made his threats to get him for it."

"The gods of chance are certainly kind to us!" Tragman exclaimed.

"I reckon!" Vonner agreed. "I don't know anything about this man Droten. He jus' rode into town. And I'd a lot rather sacrifice him than one



Nancy told Sam Vonner and Tragman, the banker, that she was dissatisfied with their management of her affairs.

o' my regular men. I'll frame it for him to pull a scrap with Fraysig. And no matter how that scrap comes out, the war will be started."

"The sooner, the better," Tragman said.

"Nancy is afraid of a fuss, and she's ordered that the boys ride back to the ranch right away," the other went on. "But you leave it to me, Tragman! I'll get our war started, all right. I'll see that Hank Snikes is a victim, so his mouth will be closed. And a couple o' other gents, too. Before it's over, everybody will be thinkin' that Hugh Fraysig and the F Bar G outfit has done all the dirt!"

"Lost in action!" James Tragman repeated. "Splendid!" There was a smile of satisfaction on his face.

"And if those extra fathers show up around here to help Miss Nancy Plake, I reckon that they c'n be attended to, also," Vonner continued. "You might keep an eye open for strangers, and send me a tip if any drift into town."

CHAPTER VII.

UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

WHEN the Circle P outfit departed from the town of Sunglare, Sam Vonner was riding ahead with Nancy Plake. The punchers were bunched behind them, Phil Droten and Old Cy Wapper bringing up the rear. The Circle P men were acting much like the members of a prison chain gang exposed to public scorn. They were quiet and morose, for they were being taken home like naughty boys; undoubtedly their feelings were similar to those of youngsters about to be sent to bed without their suppers.

Some of the F Bar G men were seen to smile as the little cavalcade left the town. One remark was overheard; it had to do with "petticoat boss." The Circle P men glared and ground their teeth in rage, but remained silent.

The Circle P boys looked forward to rather a mild pay-day celebration in the bunk house that evening. However, they could take a few drinks, and play poker, play the old phonograph, and possibly dance a bit. And Nancy had commanded it, so they were willing to obey.

Old Cy had his new clothes in a bundle tied to his saddle, having refused to use them until he had reached the ranch. His ancient horse, reënforced by a regular hotel meal, pricked up his ears and made grotesque attempts at prancing.

Phil Droten had donned a new shirt and neckerchief, and so looked fairly presentable in spite of his roll in the dirt of the street. He made no effort to thrust his acquaintance upon the other men of the Circle P. But like a youngster without a care in the world, he surveyed the country through which they passed, making himself familiar with it.

They rode slowly up into the brown hills, getting to higher land where the country was a deal better. Now there were tiny cañons with green vegetation that told of springs and trickling brooks. They were near the ranch long before sunset. And in the distance, they could see cattle wandering down over the hills in a strung-out line—white-faced beef.

Presently they turned from the trail and galloped down a tree-shaded lane to the ranch house, and went around it toward the bunk house and corrals. The men took off saddles and bridles, and, turning in their mounts, hurried to the bunk house. Droten and Old Cy took their time about it.

"She's a right pretty ranch, Phil," Old Cy said.

"She sure is, Cy," Droten replied.

"I reckon that the little lady's father must have been a good man to build up a place like this. It—it looks like a home, Phil. I sure hope that things go right with me here," was Cy's next remark.

"Why shouldn't they?" Droten asked.

"I don't know why they shouldn't, Phil, except that things have a habit of goin' wrong for me. Look at them 'dobe stables down there, boy! That's the kind to have in this country—warm in winter and cool in summer. And look at them mares with their colts, standin' under that big tree! It looks to be a reg'lar outfit, Phil!" said the old man.

"You're gettin' maudlin again," Phil Droten accused. "Let's stop investigatin' the scenery and get down to the bunk house. I jus' saw the foreman go there."

"What do you think of him, Phil?" inquired Cy.

"You never c'n tell about a foreman, Cy, until you've tried him out," Phil said. "An old-timer like you ought to know that much. Maybe he's all right, and maybe again he isn't. We've got to get acquainted with him before we decide."

They went to the bunk house, where Sam Vonner met them and assigned them to bunks. They stowed away their stuff and washed up for the evening meal in basins on a bench outside the door, discovering that Circle P well water was as cold as ice and the towels as coarse as a cow's tongue.

Lee Woo, the cook of the Circle P, was an infuriated man, for he had not expected the Circle P contingent for supper. But now he found himself confronted by a hungry gang of cowpunchers prepared to destroy as much food as he could place before them. However, a few words and a smile from Nancy Plake, whom Lee Woo adored, set matters right.

So the punchers ate, and then returned to the bunk house. Old Cy sat on his bunk and nursed his new clothes, as though they were the first he had ever possessed. He tried on the new boots and marched across the room and back, smiling like a boy.

Billy Lorn started the phonograph and kept it going. A group burst into raucous song. Others prepared for a session of poker. A few drinks were being taken, but the affair was mild for a pay-day spree.

Droten, looking up after arranging his blankets, saw Sam Vonner standing in the doorway. The foreman beckoned to him and stepped outside. Droten crossed the room slowly and went out after him.

"I wanted to talk to you, Droten," the foreman said, leading him a short distance away. "It's about Hugh Fraysig."

"What about him?" Phil asked.

"I don't want you to underestimate him, Droten, and make a sad mistake. He's a bad hombre, and it's no error when I say it! You backed him down in front of the crowd in town, and Fraysig won't forget that in a hurry," was Vonner's remark.

"I reckon I c'n take care of myself if he starts anything," Droten said.

"Under ordinary circumstances, Droten, I reckon that you could," Vonner replied. "But Fraysig ain't noted for fightin' fair—or doin' anything else fair. Our two outfits have been fightin' for years, and we're due for another outbreak. I know it's comin', Droten, and I'm gettin' ready for it. Fraysig will start it the first chance he gets. He may try to start it with you."

"What's orders, if he does?" Droten asked.

"I'm expectin' you to take care o' yourself, naturally," Vonner told him. "If he makes a move, drop him! Just keep your eyes open. In case of a man like Fraysig, it's safest to shoot first and think afterward."

"Thanks, Mr. Vonner! That's exactly what I'll do—keep my eyes open," was Phil's reply.

"If you're afraid of a range scrap,

you c'n ride on in the mornin'," the foreman said. "You're new to the country, and it ain't right to drag you into it."

"You're puttin' it straight up to me now," Droten said. "Of course, I'll stick."

"Good enough! That's all!" the other answered.

Droten went back into the bunk house, and after a few minutes got into the poker game. The foreman had walked away through the night. But after a time he appeared in the door again, and motioned to Hank Snikes, who got up and stepped outside.

Phil Droten gave his attention to the poker game. But Old Cy had no money with which to play poker; he did not care to drink; and the whining phonograph bothered him. So he drifted across the room to the door, without attracting attention; then went on outside, and contemplated the starry sky.

The ranch house was ablaze with lights, and Old Cy could hear a piano. That would be Nancy Plake playing, he supposed. He walked along the side of the bunk house, making not the slightest noise in the soft earth.

And as he came to the end of the building, he heard low voices. The foreman was talking to Hank Snikes.

"We've got to start the range war to cover our tracks, Hank," Vonner was saying. "Nancy is suspicious. She says she's got some old friends of her father's comin' here to investigate things for her. And we wouldn't feel jus' right behind prison bars, Hank."

"What has she guessed?" Hank Snikes asked.

"Jus' about everything, Hank, accordin' to what she told Tragman and me. Tragman's a bit scared, though he don't let on. He's a cool skinflint of a banker, but he c'n get scared just the same. If we don't cover our tracks, we'll all be in bad," said the foreman.

"Why me?" Hank Snikes asked.

"You're in it as deep as us," Vonner replied. "You know how we've delivered steers and got paid for 'em, and the Circle P never saw the money."

"Yeh, and I never saw much of it, either," Hank Snikes complained.

"You'll be taken care of, Hank," the other assured him.

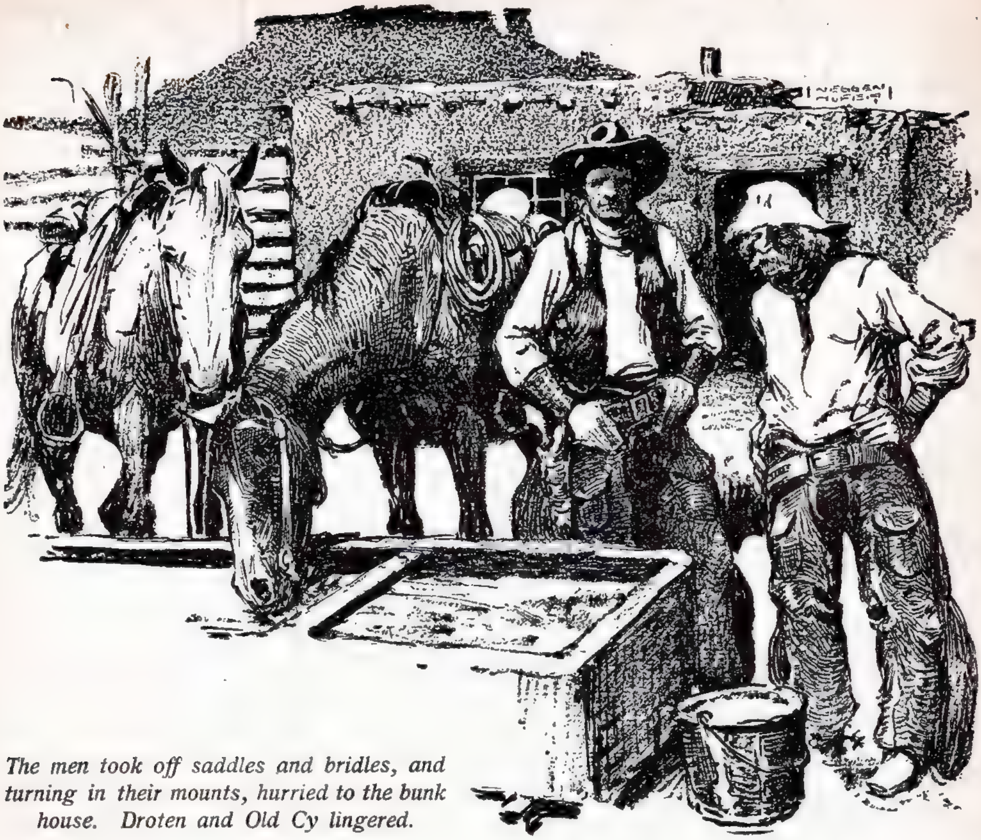
"Well! Why not give me some of it?" Snikes demanded. "You and that banker have looted the ranch and lined your pockets. You've stowed away wads, and I've been given only a few hundred."

"I'll see that you get yours the next time we go to town," Sam Vonner said. "But jus' now we've got to think about startin' a range war. It's like I told you, Hank. If we pull off a war, we can make things look suspicious for Fraysig. We've got to make it appear that he and his men have been rustlin' Circle P cattle. And if the ranch loses more stock durin' the war—well, that's to be expected."

"How are you goin' to do it?" Snikes asked. "Fraysig don't want to start a range war. He wants to court Nancy, and if the two outfits started a war he'd never have a chance to visit her."

"That's why we've got to start it for him," Vonner said. "Watch for a chance, Hank. It won't take much to start it. Only make it look like Fraysig was the one to commence. You know how this new man, Droten, backed Fraysig down. Well, if I can, I'll let young Mr. Droten start this war. I've already told him to watch out for Fraysig. They'll mix as soon as they meet. And there'll be something doin' around here inside a few days. Better get back in the bunk house now. Nancy promised to come down and dance with the boys and she's about due to get here. We want everything to look natural to her."

Old Cy Wapper managed to slip back through the darkness and sit down on the bench beside the door without be-



The men took off saddles and bridles, and turning in their mounts, hurried to the bunk house. Droten and Old Cy lingered.

ing seen. Hank Snikes and the foreman appeared almost immediately, but they had no suspicion that Cy Wapper had overheard their conversation.

"You look lonesome," the foreman remarked.

"I'm all right, Mr. Vonner," Old Cy replied. "I'm happy that I got a job."

Hank Snikes entered the bunk house, and the foreman sat down beside Old Cy on the bench.

"You're an old-timer, Wapper," he said. "I sized you up as soon as I saw you. And I reckon that you've had a lot of experience."

"That's one thing I've sure had, Mr. Vonner," said Old Cy.

"I'm goin' to tell you somethin' in confidence," the other began. "There's a fight comin' between our outfit and the F Bar G—old war breakin' out again. And a man of experience like you c'n be worth a lot to an outfit at such a time."

"Yeh, I c'n throw a gun yet," Cyrus Wapper declared. "And I know about all the tricks o' the game, I reckon."

"You're a stranger, Wapper," Vonner went on, "and don't understand everything. And I ain't got time to explain it now. But jus' remember this—you're workin' for me, Sam Vonner, the foreman of the Circle P Ranch. My orders are to be obeyed, and you ain't to take 'em from anybody else—not even from the girl owner, Wapper."

"I reckon that I don't understand that, Mr. Vonner," Old Cy declared.

"Her dad left me in charge of this outfit, along with Tragman, the Sunglare banker," Sam Vonner explained. "She's only a girl, and some girls have queer ideas about runnin' things. But I know, and you ought to know, that the only way to handle a range war is to fight it fast and furious to the end."

"I reckon," Cy admitted.

"Here comes Nancy now with her housekeeper, Mrs. Beens, as she promised. Let's get inside, Wapper. I know that I can trust you. You're on the time book. And I sure won't have you workin' around here for nothin' " Vonner said.

"Thanks," said Cy.

"You take it easy for two or three weeks until you're feelin' fit again," Vonner remarked. "Then you c'n do a man's work, Cy. I told the corral boss to assign you a good horse, so you c'n let your own fatten up and rest. If this war breaks out, I may want you to sorter hang around the house and see that the girl is all right."

"That's what I'd like to do, Mr. Vonner. And I'd sure and certain protect her the best I could," Cy Wapper declared.

They turned and entered the bunk house, and in a moment Nancy Plake appeared there with Mrs. Beens, her elderly, motherly housekeeper. Mrs. Beens had been like a real mother to the girl for years, since Nancy's mother had died when she was but twelve years of age.

The men stopped playing cards as she entered; and Billy Lorn was quick to put a dance record on the wheezing phonograph and claim the first dance. Laughingly, she danced with all of them, even compelling Old Cy to take a turn around the floor with her. Phil Droten was the last.

"Have the boys made you feel at home?" Nancy asked him as they started to dance.

"I reckon they have, miss," Droten replied. "You've got a right nice outfit here. A man c'n be proud to work for it."

"Call me Nancy, please," she said. "All the boys do. And certainly you should, if it's a part of your job to follow me around and save me from runaway mules."

"I hope that I won't have to save you from any more," Phil told her. "Not that I object to the exercise, but I hate to be throwin' you around so rough." The music stopped. "That's the shortest dance record I ever heard," he added. "I'm right down suspicious that Billy Lorn cut her short on purpose."

"Oh, we'll have other dances!" she said. She laughed and stepped back as Billy Lorn searched for another record. "That's all for this evening, boys," she declared. "I know that you'd rather have me up at the house. You go right ahead and play poker and have your little spree. Maybe Sam won't make you go to work too early in the morning. I hated to bring you out from town, but I thought it best."

"What the boss says, goes!" one of the men shouted. It was easy to see that they regarded their girl boss with enthusiastic approval.

"You don't have to hurry away, Nancy," Billy Lorn put in. "I've seen you play poker before now. I've set in a game with you—and got cleaned, too."

"Not to-night," she protested. "That's all for to-night."

"And I just found that dance record I was lookin' for," he added.

"Tired of dancing," she said, laughing again. "Why not dance with Mrs. Beens?"

"You go 'long!" the housekeeper cried.

Nancy beckoned her, and turned toward the door to leave the bunk house. Then, suddenly she stopped, startled, for two men had come into the room. One of them was Hugh Fraysig, of F Bar G; and the other was his foreman, George Ramberg.

CHAPTER VIII.

WAR IS DECLARED.

SURPRISE caused silence for a moment; and during that moment several of the Circle P men started moving slowly and carefully toward the pegs in the wall where their holstered guns were hanging. A visit by Hugh Fraysig and his foreman at this hour of the evening might mean nothing or anything. But usually, Fraysig and his entire outfit remained in Sunglare the night of pay day.

"Good evenin', Miss Nancy," Fraysig said. "Tell your boys that they needn't be reachin' for their hardware. I ain't got a gun on me, and neither has Ramberg."

"Why should you have?" Nancy asked. "You don't consider the Circle P enemy's country, do you?"

"A man never can tell," Fraysig declared. "I wanted to see you, Miss Nancy, and you weren't at the house. Then I heard the phonograph, and thought that maybe you were down here givin' the boys a little party in the bunkhouse."

"Come right on in," Nancy said. "The boys have been trying to get me into a poker game, and I've been dodging it."

Her tone was ordinary, the words not worthy of special mention, and her manner quite as usual. Outwardly, Nancy Plake was unruffled, but she was wondering what this visit meant. Fraysig had a habit of dropping in to see her now and then, but now there was something in the manner of the F Bar G's owner that indicated plainly that he had not come merely to advance his suit with Nancy Plake.

"Shall we go up to the house?" Nancy asked.

"I came to say somethin', Miss Plake, and I might as well say it here," Hugh Fraysig replied. "It won't take me long, and then I'll be ridin' on. And I want your foreman to hear it, and your men."

Nancy sat down on the nearest bench and looked up at him expectantly. Fraysig stood just inside the door, and George Ramberg was immediately behind him. But if either man wore a gun, the weapon was not in sight.

"Miss Plake," Fraysig said, "I reckon that I know why you brought your outfit out from town. Unless I'm mistaken, you didn't want any fuss started between the Circle P and the F Bar G; didn't want anything to happen durin' the pay-day spree that might cause the old range trouble we've had to break out again."

"That is it, exactly," Nancy told him.

"I admire you for it, Miss Plake," Fraysig said. "In town, I was orderin' my men to keep their hands off, too. I ain't eager for any range war, and I'm tryin' to prevent one—but the F Bar G will protect itself if one is started."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "I—I do not understand your attitude."

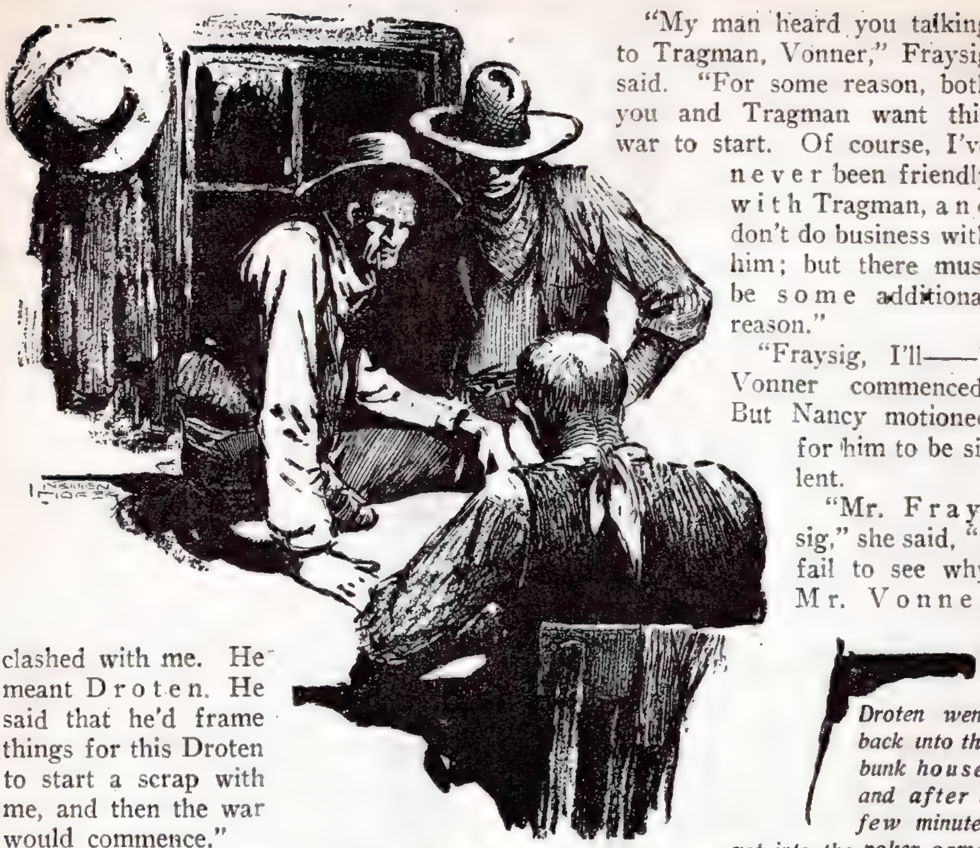
"After you left the bank, Miss Plake, your foreman remained behind to talk to James Tragman. One of my punchers, on his way to the corral, happened to walk alongside the bank buildin', and the window of that little rear room was open. He didn't overhear all the conversation between Vonner and Tragman, but what he did hear was downright interestin'," Fraysig said.

"What was it?" Nancy Plake asked. "Was it anything that concerns me?"

"Since you are the owner of the Circle P outfit, it surely concerns you," Fraysig told her. "Sam Vonner was agreein' to start the range war again."

"What bunch o' lies is this?" Vonner demanded.

"I'm here alone with Ramberg, and neither of us has a gun, so you can safely call me a liar," Fraysig said, sneering a bit. He faced Nancy again. "Vonner told Tragman that he had hired a new man, who already had



Droten went back into the bunk house, and after a few minutes got into the poker game.

clashed with me. He meant Droten. He said that he'd frame things for this Droten to start a scrap with me, and then the war would commence."

"Why, I don't understand!" Nancy cried bewildered.

"I don't believe that you do, Miss Plake," Fraysig told her. "But your foreman, for some reason, is determined to start the fuss all over again. He's been proddin' my outfit for the last month or so. I thought in town that this man Droten was a hired gunman Vonner had imported, but I apologize now to Mr. Droten for that. When he was talkin' to Tragman, Vonner admitted that Droten was a stranger to him and that he never saw him until to-day."

"Sam, what does all this mean?" Nancy asked.

Sam Vonner's face was purple with rage. "It means that Hugh Fraysig is tryin' to play some kind of a crooked game—but he ain't goin' to get away with it!" the foreman replied.

"My man heard you talking to Tragman, Vonner," Fraysig said. "For some reason, both you and Tragman want this war to start. Of course, I've never been friendly with Tragman, and don't do business with him; but there must be some additional reason."

"Fraysig, I'll——" Vonner commenced. But Nancy motioned for him to be silent.

"Mr. Fraysig," she said, "I fail to see why Mr. Vonner should want to commence a range war. And surely I do not. Where would we gain anything by it? I can remember the last one, though I was only a little girl—men killed, buildings burned, herds scattered! My herds haven't been doing any too well recently——"

"And your foreman, Miss Plake, has been hintin' around that the F Bar G is somewhat responsible," Fraysig put in. "I'm not a rustler, Miss Plake, and my men aren't rustlers! I may have a lot of faults, but I've been a good and honest neighbor. And I certainly wouldn't raise my hand against you, Nancy."

There was a meaning to the speech that Nancy understood. If Hugh Fraysig hoped to win her, he certainly would not want to begin war on her outfit and thus cut himself off from visiting her.

"Fraysig, what do you mean by comin' here with this kind of a wild tale?" Sam Vonner demanded, taking a step forward. "Tryin' to make it look like I wanted trouble! You are the one who wants trouble, and you know it! You want a war. You want to smash the Circle P and then buy it in for a small part of what it's worth!"

"It's you and Tragman who want trouble—and it's peculiar why you do," Fraysig replied. "If I was Miss Nancy, I'd look into things better. Maybe some men have been trusted too much."

"Why, you——!" Vonner began.

"I haven't a gun on me, Vonner," Fraysig reminded him again. "But I'll remember your words, and I'll meet you again some time."

"You didn't have nerve enough to come here with a gun on!" Vonner stormed. "You come here unarmed, and throw insults around, knowin' that we won't shoot down an unarmed man. Fraysig, you're a yellow cur!"

Hugh Fraysig sucked in his breath quickly, and George Ramberg uttered an exclamation of rage. The owner of the F Bar G fought to control himself. He won, and faced Nancy again.

"You can see how it is, Miss Plake," he said. "They're determined to start a fuss. I came here to tell you, Miss Plake, that it wouldn't be the F Bar G that'd start a scrap. I came here to open your eyes. And to tell you that, if there's a scrap started, the F Bar G will certainly defend itself."

"Oh, why do you talk of trouble?" Nancy cried. "Where is the necessity for it? Surely the range is big enough for us both."

"It's plenty big enough for both our outfits, and then some, but maybe not for all the men that belongs to 'em," Fraysig intimated.

"I'll meet you some time when you've got a gun on!" Vonner cried.

"If you do, Vonner, look out for yourself!" Fraysig told him. "Men call me hard-boiled and mean—that is, some men. And maybe I am. But I don't deliberately start range wars, Vonner. And I don't steal cattle. And I'm right down sure that I wouldn't stoop so low as to rob a woman!"

"What do you mean by that?" Sam Vonner shouted. "That's enough, Fraysig! Out of here! Off the ranch! Armed or not, I'll shoot you down if you——"

"Please! Please!" Nancy cried, springing to her feet. "There is no sense in this quarrel."

"I'm handlin' this now, Nancy!" Vonner told her. "It's no affair for a woman." His eyes were flaming, and his chest rising and falling rapidly with his labored breathing. "Out of here, Fraysig!"

"I'll certainly not remain where I'm not wanted," Hugh Fraysig said. "I came here to speak my piece, and I've spoken it. But I notice that Miss Plake hasn't ordered me away."

"I'm runnin' this outfit just now!" Vonner cried. "You've gone too far, Fraysig! Start a range war, huh? You've started it yourself by comin' here and shootin' off your mouth! All right, Fraysig—the war's on!"

"No—no!" Nancy protested.

"And before it's over, we'll clean you out, Fraysig—clean out that bunch o' rustlers on the F Bar G!" Vonner said.

Fraysig's face went white, and his hands opened and closed spasmodically.

"I'm rememberin' that, Vonner!" Fraysig said. "Maybe you won't talk so big when I've got a gun. And I'll have one as soon as I get back to my ranch. If you want war, you crook, you can have it!"

"I'll smash you with my bare hands!" Vonner shouted.

He hurled himself forward, but several of the punchers got between the two belligerents.

"Nancy's here, Sam!" Billy Lorn warned. "You control yourself!"

And now Nancy Plake was between the two men also. Silence came again as the girl faced Hugh Fraysig.

"I am the owner of the Circle P outfit," she said. "I'll not allow my men to start trouble. And I expect you to control your men, Mr. Fraysig. If you and Mr. Vonner have personal differences, get together somewhere and settle them, but don't drag the two outfits into your war."

"That is what I'm tryin' to avoid," Fraysig said.

"Him and his bunch o' rustlers are already in a war!" Vonner stormed.

"Miss Nancy," Fraysig said, facing her and ignoring Vonner, "surely you can see that he is doing everything to start a fuss. For some reason, his men are standing with him. They want a fight. You are the owner of the Circle P, but Sam Vonner is runnin' it, as he says. And he tells me that it's to be war."

"Yes, it's war!" Vonner cried. "War until you've been run out of the country, Fraysig!"

Hugh Fraysig looked him straight in the eyes for a moment, his own countenance almost expressionless. Then the owner of the F Bar G, moving aside without making a reply, turned to Nancy again, and bowed to her.

"I must be gettin' back home, Miss Plake," he said. "I have tried to tell you some truths, to warn you, and to prevent trouble. But you can see how it is. If you can control your own outfit, everything will be all right. I'll probably know to-morrow. Good evening!"

He stalked to the door, George Ramberg going out before him. At the door, Fraysig turned.

"Certain persons know that I came here unarmed, and for what reason," Fraysig added. "And if George Ramberg and I are found somewhere along the road in the morning, shot in the back, everybody'll know who did it!"

"Get out—out!" Sam Vonner shouted like a madman. "I won't stand any more! I'll——"

But Hugh Fraysig had gone without waiting to hear this tirade. The sounds of pounding horses' hoofs drifted back into the bunk house.

CHAPTER IX.

A DIVIDED OUTFIT.

THEN Nancy Plake, her face aflame and her eyes snapping with anger, turned upon Sam Vonner.

"How dare you humiliate me so?" she cried. "And you've done the very thing that will start a fight. It wasn't necessary. That man came here unarmed, in the interests of peace. You deliberately thrust aside my wishes. Do you own this outfit, or do I?"

"Oh, you own it!" Sam Vonner announced. "But I'm runnin' it just now!"

"What do you mean by that?" Nancy demanded. "Do you think that the ranch can't get along without you? War never helps prosperity. If I say that I want peace——"

"You're only a girl," Vonner interrupted. "You don't know anything about such affairs."

"I know that I don't want a range war," she said. "There is no sense in two outfits fighting each other. And I want a little consideration from you, too!"

"The best thing for you to do is to go to the house and stay there," the foreman told her. "Eat, sleep, read and play the piano. I'll 'tend to everything else. There's a war on, and it sure can't be stopped now. It's my duty to protect the outfit."

"Protect the outfit!" she scorned. "And are you protecting the outfit when you get it mixed up in a range war? Why are you so eager for one? And why were you talking about it to Tragman?"

"Tragman's naturally interested, since he's our business agent. I jus' told him Fraysig was fixin' to start one. The rest is some of Fraysig's lies. He came here to-night to say somethin' that would start a fuss," Vonner tried to explain.

"Hugh Fraysig has every reason for not wanting a fight," she replied. "And are you quite sure that what he said was a lie? Have you forgotten what I told you and Tragman in the bank? And why did Fraysig say that about—about robbing a woman?"

"Are you tryin' to accuse me of bein' dishonest?" the foreman demanded.

"I do not want to do so," Nancy answered. "But things certainly look very peculiar to me. I'm not exactly dumb, and I know a lot about business. Dad taught me. If you really want to to stand by me and help me, send word to the F Bar G that there'll be peace."

"Yeh? I see myself doin' that, after what Fraysig said! It's war until one of us is driven out!" was Vonner's retort.

"Kindly remember that it is my property that you are risking," she told him. "And I do not care to have it risked when it is not necessary. I think you forget yourself. You're only the foreman here—a hired man!"

Her words were as a lash to him. Anger surged into his face again. He took a step toward her.

"Let everybody think that I'm only the foreman—I don't care!" he said. "But I'm the boss!"

"Sam Vonner!" she replied angrily. "I cannot endure such talk from you! Your service with the Circle P is ended. You may leave the ranch in the morning. I'll name a new foreman then—and he'll be one who doesn't want to fight." She turned and started toward the door, the housekeeper after her.

"Yeh?" Sam Vonner cried, springing in front of her and preventing her exit. "Not so fast, young lady! You won't kick me off the ranch like this! I reckon that you don't savvy just how I've got everything in my hands."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean that the Circle P is goin' to fight Fraysig. The boys are all with me. I refuse to be fired, and so do the boys. You go right on ownin' the ranch, but we'll run it to suit ourselves."

"I scarcely think you'll get away with anything like that!" Nancy replied.

"No?" said Sam. "With this war on, nobody will come visitin' around here. And we'll see that you don't go visitin', and don't communicate with anybody. So everybody'll think the war is with your consent."

"So I'm to be a prisoner on my own ranch, am I?" she demanded. "You're going to play that you're a ship's crew turning mutineers and doing as you please with the captain, are you?"

"Somethin' like that," Vonner admitted.

"How dare you? Get your things together and leave the ranch at once!" she commanded. She faced the others. "I expect you boys to help me," she continued. "You don't take orders from Sam Vonner any longer."

"Don't they?" Vonner said. "I happen to be in command here, little lady! Get suspicious of me, will you? Intimate that I'm dishonest, huh?"

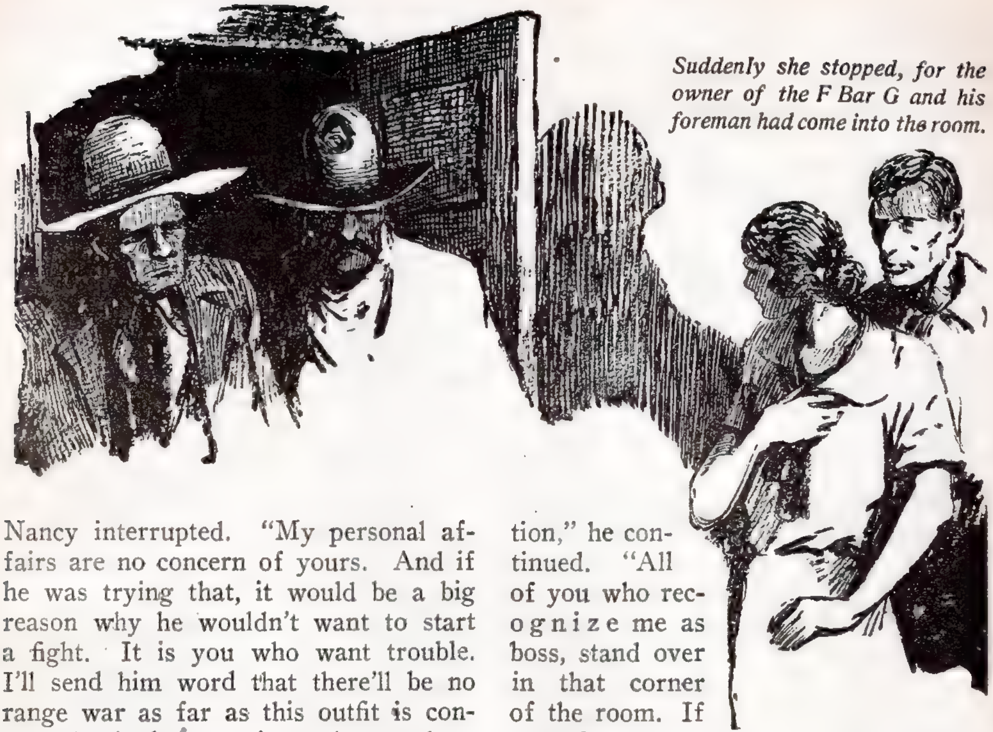
"And now I am quite sure of it!" she told him. "Your actions show it. You—and Tragman——"

"That's enough!" Vonner snapped. "I'll bring the outfit through this range war, all right. Fraysig has been stealing our cattle——"

"I don't believe it!" she cried. "He is a cad and a bully, but I do not think he is a thief."

"And he's been tryin' to get you to marry him," Sam continued, "so's he c'n get his hands on the Circle P. And 'cause you won't——"

"That is quite enough, Mr. Vonner!"



Suddenly she stopped, for the owner of the F Bar G and his foreman had come into the room.

Nancy interrupted. "My personal affairs are no concern of yours. And if he was trying that, it would be a big reason why he wouldn't want to start a fight. It is you who want trouble. I'll send him word that there'll be no range war as far as this outfit is concerned. And I am going to have a thorough investigation of the ranch's affairs, too."

"You'll send no message! You'll see nobody, and you'll say nothing!" Sam Vonner declared, hotly. "You'll be a prisoner until this is all over. And if you don't act and talk right then, we'll all swear that you ordered us to fight the Fraysig outfit!"

She stepped toward him. In Nancy Plake's makeup were several qualities for which her father had been noted—courageous determination for one.

"You're done, Mr. Vonner!" she told him. "Pack your things, and get off the ranch!"

"I reckon not!" was the foreman's reply.

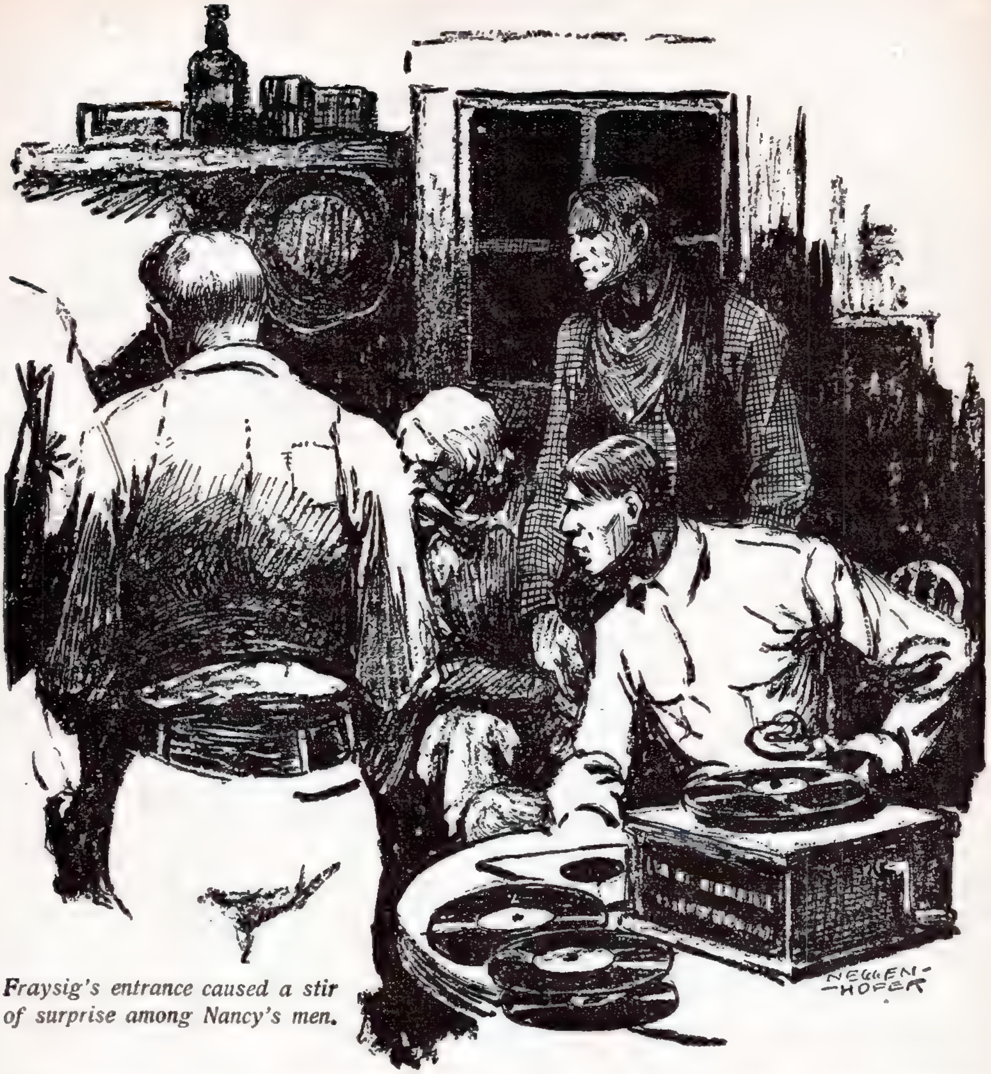
"You'll not go? Then you compel me to have the boys throw you off!"

"The boys happen to be takin' orders from me only, and not from you!" Vonner said. He turned and faced the punchers. "You boys have heard, and I reckon that you understand the situation," he continued. "All of you who recognize me as boss, stand over in that corner of the room. If any of you want to side with this girl, swallow Fraysig's insults, and be known as yellow-backs all the rest of your lives, stand over by her."

Sam Vonner did not hesitate to make this test, since he did not for a moment doubt the outcome. For the past six months he had been weeding from the outfit men of whom he could not be sure. There remained, for the greater part, scoundrels who had pretended an adoration for Nancy and the Circle P, but who in reality cared for neither, and were hand in glove with Vonner in his looting of the ranch.

Nancy Plake had suspected none of this. Sam Vonner had told her, as each man left, that he had wanted to drift on. And he had hired in their places men of his own type, men whom he knew he could handle as he pleased, and she had not questioned it.

"Sam Vonner, you must be an utter fool!" she now exclaimed. "You really must be insane! How can a foreman



Fraysig's entrance caused a stir of surprise among Nancy's men.

have authority against an owner? You are really trying to steal the ranch from under my very eyes. And you are not even the foreman any longer. I've discharged you!"

"Yeh?" Vonner sneered. He turned to the men again. "Make your choice, boys!" he said.

Hank Snikes was the first to make a move, and he moved toward the corner where Vonner's men were to stand. Some of the others followed him without hesitation. Billy Lorn did not, however. The juvenile of the outfit evidently had ideas of his own.

"Sam, you're crazy!" Billy declared. "You can't get away with a thing like this. I'm for Miss Nancy, first, last and all the time. She owns this ranch, and it's for her to say what the ranch policy is to be. And I don't see the need of us bucklin' on guns and havin' a big scrap, either. I'm takin' orders from the owner!"

"That's all right with me, Billy," Vonner said. "I like to see a man stand where he wants to, and you're honest about it. No hard feelin's."

Old Cyrus Wapper stood in the middle of the room, scratching at his thin hair, with a puzzled expression on his weather-stained face.

"This here is a right hard proposition for me," Old Cy said. "I sure need a job bad, and I almost shed tears o' joy to-day when I got this one. I thought maybe I'd have a sort o' home for a time. But I hired out to work for the Circle P, and this little lady is the owner. I don't want to go agin' you, Mr. Vonner, and yet I don't see how I c'n do anything else. I reckon that I'll stick by Miss Nancy."

"All right, Wapper!" Vonner said. "Suit yourself!"

Vonner believed that Old Cy was being crafty, that Cy thought Vonner wanted him to side with the girl and keep watch over her, so that Vonner would have a friend in the enemy's camp. He believed that his little conversation with Cy, and the mention that he was on the pay roll, had won Cy to his side.

"There, Nancy!" Sam Vonner said. "You c'n see how the boys stand."

"I see," she replied. "It means, of course, that I'll have to discharge them all and get a new outfit. I'm sorry, because the most of them are good men, and are making a mistake in standing by a man like you. I—I cannot understand it! Can't a ranch owner handle her own ranch the way she likes? Can't she say whether there will be peace or war? Can't she discharge a foreman if he won't obey orders?"

"Not this time!" Vonner told her.

"But why are you doing this? Why go against my wishes? Why shouldn't all of you be loyal to me? Is it true that you have been robbing me, all of you?" she asked.

"That's enough!" Vonner snapped.

"Don't you dare take that tone to me!" Nancy replied. "You think that I am helpless, have no friends. I may have some in a few days. And meanwhile I'll send to the county-seat—get a lawyer——"

"You won't have a chance," Vonner said. "You and Mrs. Beens are going to stay at the house and not see anybody. You'll not be hurt any, but you won't be allowed to interfere in this affair. And if you don't do as I order, I'll pack you to the cabin up in the cañon, with a couple o' men to guard you! After we've 'tended to Fraysig, you c'n do as you blamed please."

"Then I'll have you arrested——"

"And every man here will swear that you ordered the range war, will swear to any story I fix up," Vonner informed her deliberately. "You and Mrs. Beens and Billy Lorn and Cy Wapper can't stand against the whole gang."

"You—you thief!" she cried. "I know, now, that it is true—you and James Tragman have been robbing me. Oh, but I have been blind! I was fool enough to trust you. And my father was suspicious of you before he died. Maybe I'll never make you pay for it—but I know!"

For a moment, then, she was speechless, throttled by conflicting emotions. But, as Sam Vonner stepped toward her, she was herself again.

"Is there no one to help me?" she cried. Then she saw Phil Droten standing over against the wall; he had not taken sides. "You—Mr. Droten? I never saw you until to-day. But I'm sure that you're the right sort of man. And you come from a part of the country where women are respected and guarded. Will you fight for me? Will you come over here, and stand beside Billy Lorn and Cyrus Wapper? The foreman's job is waiting for you!"

Phil Droten raised his head and looked at her, his face inscrutable. His glance rested for an instant on Old Cy, who was standing proudly beside Nancy Plake. Then he looked across at Sam Vonner.

And then Phil Droten moved—and stepped across the room to the corner, to join Sam Vonner's men!

CHAPTER X.

OUT OF THE WAY.

NANCY PLAKE'S face flushed again, and this time partially because of embarrassment that her plea to this man had availed her nothing. Sam Vonner laughed nastily.

"You see how it is, Nancy," he said.

"I am not Nancy to you any more," she told him. "Yes, I see how it is. In the entire outfit, only two men who are honest, and willing to help a woman in trouble. A nice outfit you command, Mr. Vonner! Come on, Mrs. Beens, and we'll go to the house, where the atmosphere is cleaner. You haven't heard the end of this matter, Sam Vonner!"

"Take Billy Lorn and Old Cy along with you, Miss Plake," Vonner said, his lips curling. "They can take what stuff they need, except their guns. And I'll send a couple of men to search the house for guns, and bring all of them down here."

"Certainly I'll take Billy and Cy to the house," she said. "I want my real friends close to me. There is plenty of room in the house."

Vonner quickly named two men to go with her and search for guns, and she swept regally from the bunk house. Mrs. Beens tottered at her heels, breathing heavily, as though emotion had claimed her as much as it had her young mistress.

After they were gone, Vonner looked at Billy Lorn and Cy Wapper, but voiced no rebuke for the choice they had made.

"Take anything you want, except your guns," he said.

They gathered up some of their effects and prepared to carry them up to the house. Old Cy looked often at Phil Droten, both surprise and rebuke in his manner; but Droten would not meet his gaze.

Vonner waited until they had gone, and then picked out two more of the men.

"You're to guard the house," he instructed. "You'll be relieved after daylight. You be danged sure that Billy or that old man don't sneak out and make a get-away. I'll send another man down to guard the corral—none of 'em can get far without a horse. I don't want any of 'em to get off the ranch. And I don't want any visitors seein' them, either. You men at the house will stop anybody who comes, and call me."

The men he named went to their posts, and Sam Vonner sat down beside the table in the middle of the room, like a general in his field headquarters. He called two more men to him.

"As soon as it's daylight in the mornin', you take a couple o' pack horses, make up an outfit, and hit for that high place in the hills," he commanded. "Take a pair o' field glasses along. You c'n watch the whole country from there. You c'n see the F Bar G. Signal if you see any of them movin' this way, or if there is anything wrong. Day or night. Somebody down here will be watchin' for your signals. I'll explain 'em to you later."

He turned and looked at the rest of them, sitting on the sides of their bunks and waiting for orders.

"Hank, I'll have some special orders for you a little later," he told Snikes. "You, Droten, step outside with me. I want a little chat with you."

Phil Droten got up, finished rolling a cigarette, struck a match and lighted it, and strolled outside. Vonner walked with him to the end of the bunk house.

"I'm glad to see that you've got sense, Droten," Vonner said. "I think that I've sized you up right. You're a fightin' man. And you're wiser than the rest o' the bunch—got a better education, I reckon. You didn't make any mistake throwin' in with me."

"I don't know whether I did or not," Droten replied. "I thought maybe it'd be best—but you haven't said anything yet."

"What do you mean, Droten?" the foreman inquired.

"You just said that maybe I was wiser than the rest o' the bunch," was Droten's answer. "You ain't goin' to all this trouble for nothin', Vonner. You bet I c'n be a good fightin' man—when there's somethin' to fight for."

"I see!" Vonner said. "You'll get yours."

"Thanks! But just how? You can't blame me for askin', Sam. If I'm bucklin' on my gun to help you play your game——"

"I'm not tellin' you everything, Droten. I ain't known you but a few hours," Vonner protested.

"I c'n well understand that," Phil Droten replied. "And I don't blame you for bein' careful. I jus' wanted an inklin', Sam. It's my idea that you've been milkin' the ranch—there's a thousand ways a man in your position could do it. But how do I know that I'll ever get mine for throwin' in with you? Can you pass it to me now?"

"No! Think I'm a fool to carry loot around with me?" Vonner asked. "There's plenty in Tragman's bank."

"Yeh?" asked Phil. "I don't know this Tragman, but I've seen a lot of them country skinflint bankers, Sam. He may get away with all of it and leave you holdin' the bag as well as me."

"Not much he won't! He's in this as deep as I am," Vonner said.

"All right, Sam. I'm with you!" was Droten's reply.

"That's the talk!" the other assured him. "I want you to relieve the house guards when daylight comes, so you might as well try to get some sleep. One good man at the house will be enough in daylight. Jus' keep those in the house from seein' and talkin' to anybody from outside. I'll see you again later."

They went back to the door of the bunk house. Phil Droten went inside, and Vonner called Hank Snikes to him. He led Snikes down toward the corral.

"Hank, she's busted loose!" he said. "We've got to move quick now. We've got to get word to Tragman right away. I want to see him and talk things over, and I'm goin' to ride into town right now, and be back a little after daylight."

"Yeh? You'd better not go alone, Sam," Snikes said. "That town trail might be dangerous, if the F Bar G gang is already on the warpath. And you might just naturally collect your share from Tragman and ride on, and forget to come back, Sam. Then where would we be?"

"Think that I'm tryin' to double cross you?" Vonner demanded. "Saddle up, then, and come along with me. I'll make Tragman give you some real money. But you've got to promise to come back with me and help put this scrap across. We've got to muss up things so there won't be any tracks left."

"That's the talk!" Hank Snikes said. "I'll be wantin' a nice little bunch o' coin. Give me that, and I'm ready to fight as long as there's any fightin' to be done."

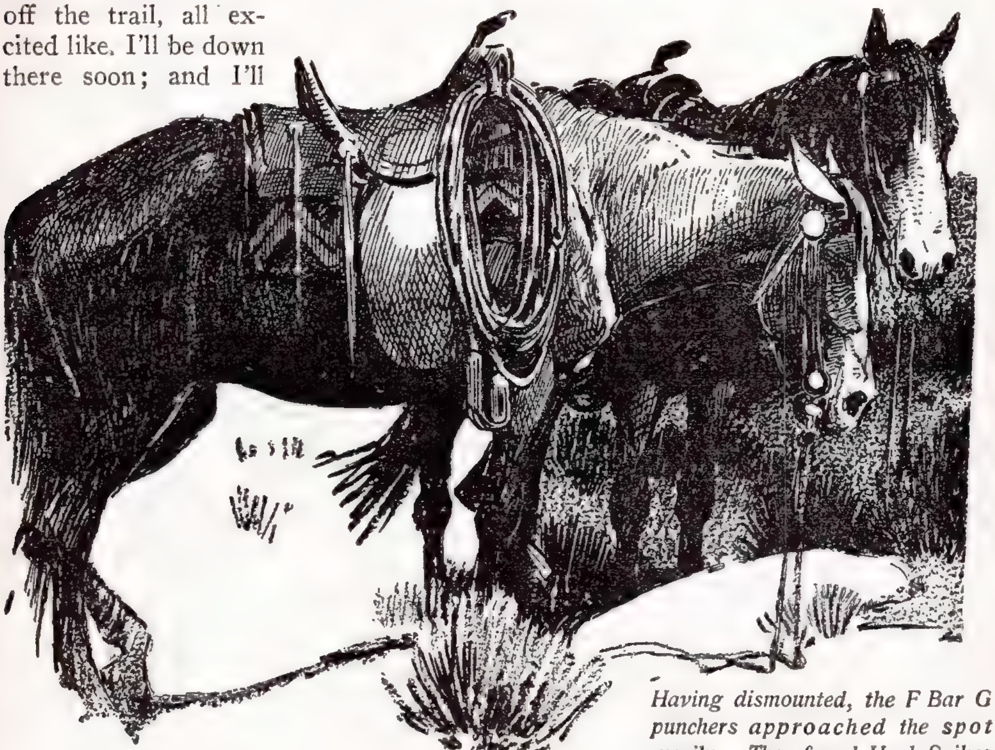
They went on to the corral, where they caught their horses in the bright moonlight and put saddles and bridles on. Sam Vonner issued more orders to the corral guard; and then, with Hank beside him, rode slowly down the lane toward the distant town trail, going as quietly as possible.

When the main trail was reached, they gave their mounts the spurs and started toward Sunglare, flinging a shouted word at each other now and then.

On they rode, mile after mile, through cañons and over the crests of slopes; now galloping at a good rate of speed, now allowing their horses to walk. Once Vonner called a halt.

"They got Hank. I made a ride for it and got away, though some o' their bullets came pretty close. Hank is the first victim o' the war," the foreman continued.

"Um!" James Tragman grunted. "Not at all bad, Sam. That story sounds fine. Now you'd better go down to The Mansion and spread it. Some of the boys will be drinkin' and playin' poker there. Ride around town and come gallopin' in off the trail, all excited like. I'll be down there soon; and I'll say that I'll send word to the sheriff in the morning. That'll keep anybody else from doing it. We certainly do not want Sheriff Bill Mattise out here too soon."



Having dismounted, the F Bar G punchers approached the spot warily. They found Hank Snikes in the middle of the trail.

"Right!" Vonner said, turning toward his horse.

"And—Sam?" The other hesitated.

"Well?" demanded the foreman.

"Did you clean your gun—after Hank was killed?" Tragman asked.

"Sure! I fired a few shots at them F Bar G jaspers. I'm not a fool to run around with a gun part empty when there's a range war goin' on," Sam replied.

"You're carryin' a .45, of course?" the banker asked.

"Sure!" was Sam's ready reply to that question.

"That's good!" Tragman remarked. "Lots of .45s in the country. So nobody can prove, if they investigate closely, that it was a bullet from your gun that killed Hank."

"What do you mean, Tragman?" Sam asked.

"I am not exactly an infant, Sam," was Tragman's reply. "You have done very well indeed. Better go and spread the news now. I'll hear the excitement and come down to The Mansion in about fifteen minutes, and do my part."

"No use killin' the horses, Hank," he said. "We've got to ride back, you know. Let's roll a smoke."

"Here's where the F Bar G trail comes in," Hank said. "After to-night, we'll have to be mighty careful about this locality. Fraysig sure spilled the beans, didn't he?"

"Yeh! I'm hopin' that we c'n spill him before this thing is done," was Sam's remark.

"We're takin' a chance handlin' Nancy this way," Hank reminded him.

"Where's the chance?" Sam asked. "We'll see that nobody gets to her, so she c'n talk. After the row, we'll swear she backed the range war. We c'n simply quit and ride away, and she'll never be able to prove anything. Then, we'll have ours, Hank."

"Yeh! We'll have ours," Hank Snikes agreed. "Why not simply collect from Tragman to-night and ride on?"

"And have every sheriff in the country lookin' for us?" the other replied. "Don't be a fool, Hank! I'm out to get Fraysig, too! We've got to make everybody believe that his gang have been rustlin' Circle P steers. Let's be goin' on!"

Hank Snikes gathered up the reins and prodded his mount with the spurs, starting out ahead. It was his fatal mistake.

Sam Vonner tossed away his cigarette and started after him. In the bright moonlight, Hank was silhouetted against the sky. A gun roared. Hank Snikes gave one cry and toppled from the saddle. His horse dashed away, frightened.

Sam Vonner stopped his horse and sprang to the ground, the smoking gun still in his hand. He knelt beside the fallen man.

"That's done!" he whispered. "I reckon you're out of the way, Hank Snikes! Not a bad little play, this! Your mouth is shut forever. Tragman and I split your share of the loot—and we can blame this on the F Bar G!"

He rode on a short distance, then allowed his horse to walk while he cleaned his six-gun and inserted a fresh cartridge. He put the exploded shell into a pocket, and three miles farther on he hurled it far into the brush beside the trail. Then he hurried on to the town.

An hour later, he was pounding on the door of the little cottage, where James Tragman lived alone with an ancient Chinaman who acted as housekeeper. The banker came to the door, and Vonner beckoned him outside.

"She's broke out, Tragman," he reported. "Fraysig came to the Circle P and said that one of his men had heard us talkin' in the bank. I pulled a row with him and declared war—nothin' else to do. Nancy cut up, and I made her a prisoner in the house; and I'll keep her there until everything is runnin' wild."

"I was afraid of it, Sam," Tragman said.

"Cuss it, you said to start the war," was Sam's reply.

"Yes. But if you haven't been careful——" the other began.

"I've been careful!" Sam interrupted. "The men are all with me except two. I'll take care of everything at the ranch. And Hank Snikes won't talk, Tragman—he can't."

"What happened to Hank?" the banker asked.

"He started to town with me, Tragman. Know where the F Bar G trail comes into the main road? Two o' Fraysig's men ambushed us there."

"How do you know that they were Fraysig's men?" Tragman asked.

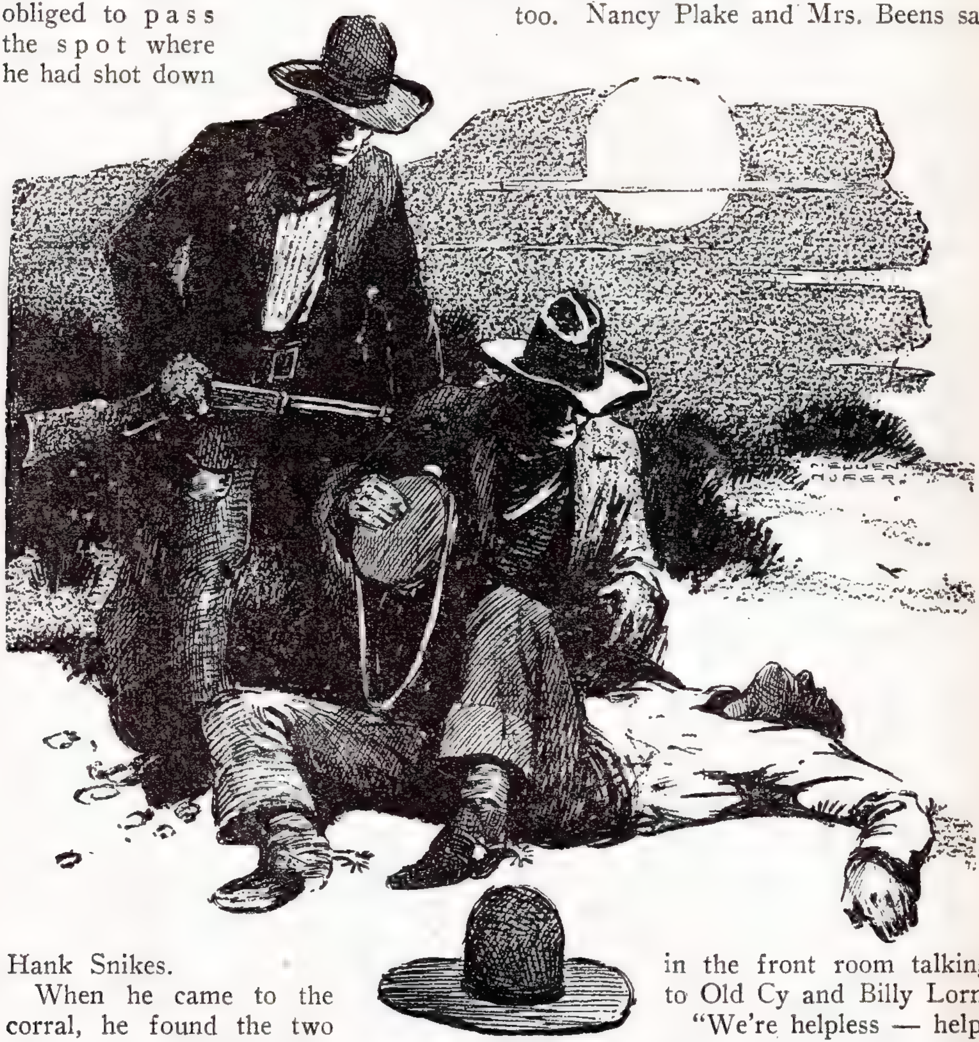
"Recognized 'em! Can name 'em! If Fraysig and the others say they was somewhere else, naturally they'd lie to protect their pals and themselves," was Sam's reply.

"I suppose so," Tragman said.

CHAPTER XI.

"DON'T WORRY!"

SAM VONNER got back to the Circle P just at break of day. He had not followed the main trail all of the distance from town, for he did not want to encounter any of Fraysig's men while he was alone; and he feared that they might be watching the road. So he was not obliged to pass the spot where he had shot down Hank Snikes.



When he came to the corral, he found the two men whom he had designated putting packs of supplies on pack horses, preparing to ride to the lookout post up in the hills. Vonner gave them orders regarding the signals, and went on to the bunk house, where he spread the news of Hank's killing, ascribing it to the F Bar G.

All the men in the bunk house were awake, and most of them were dressed. Appetizing odors came from the cookhouse, where Lee Woo, not having received orders to the contrary, went about his regular job of preparing breakfast for the outfit.

All those in the ranch house were up, too. Nancy Plake and Mrs. Beens sat in the front room talking to Old Cy and Billy Lorn.

"We're helpless — helpless!" Nancy cried. "Oh, if we could only do something! Being robbed is bad enough, but to have men killed and property destroyed, and to be blamed for it——"

"The truth will come out some day, Nancy dear," Mrs. Beens said, trying to comfort the girl.

"If I could only do something. If there was somebody to help. If my fighting fathers would only come now!" Nancy cried. "My father said that they would surely come, if they got the letters."

"And how will you know 'em if they do come?" Billy Lorn asked. "You don't even know their names, Nancy."

"I'll know," the girl said. "Wait—I'll show you!"

She went into her own room, and returned almost immediately. On the table before them she put a piece of a silver dollar.

"Do you see that?' she asked. "Dad gave me that. When he and his friends separated, they cut a silver dollar into three pieces, and each of them kept a piece. The man who tells me that he is one of dad's old friends will have to match that piece of silver."

"They may not get here in time," Billy said. "And they may not be able to do much when they do get here."

Old Cy had been standing near one of the windows, looking at a group of saddled Circle P horses standing in the sandy ground down by the corral. Now he left the window and turned toward them.

"Miss Nancy," said Old Cy, "I reckon that it's time for me to say a few words. And maybe you won't be right down eager to hear 'em. My name's Cyrus, all right, but the last name ain't Wapper. The last name is Brakeness."

"I—I don't understand," she said.

"I had a reason for usin' a name that wasn't my own. I'm almost ashamed to say it, Miss Nancy, me bein' a sort of down-and-outer, but I—well, I'm one of them fightin' fathers that you're talkin' about!"

"You?" she cried, as Billy Lorn and Mrs. Beens looked up in astonishment.

Old Cy fumbled in a pocket and brought forth a piece of silver, which he tossed down upon the table. Nancy fitted it against the piece her father had given her.

"It's true!" she said.

"And I—I can't help much," said Old Cy. "But when I got your father's letter I made tracks for here as quick as I could. I've had a lot o' hard luck the last few years, and I've been sick a lot o' the time. I didn't know what I could do to help, but thought I'd come and see. Here's the letter your father sent me." He put it down upon the table in front of the girl.

"He wrote that he was dyin' and leavin' his little girl all alone. He mistrusted his foreman and banker, he said. He said for me to come here and not let anybody know at first who I was, in case he had died. That's why I called myself Wapper. He wanted me to nose around and find out the lay o' the land, I reckon. But there wasn't much need to do that, the way things happened.

"I knew your father a good many years ago," Cy continued. "Your father, and me, and a man named Slatman was down in Mexico, and we got tangled up in one o' them revolutions. Thought it was a lark, we bein' youngsters. But it wasn't a lark when they planned to shoot us agin' a stone wall some mornin' at sunrise."

"I wish dad had told me all about it," Nancy said.

"Oh, I reckon, same as me, he thought it kinder childish, the deal we made to go to each other's help if need be. We went through a lot in them days. And we made our bargain when we separated, and split that dollar in its three pieces. Your father and I went to help Slatman once, about fifteen years ago. I don't know where he is now. I've been driftin'."

"Oh, I'm glad that you came!" Nancy exclaimed.

"So'm I, if only to see my old friend's

little girl," said Old Cy. "I got your dad's letter through a lawyer we all knew—jus' happened to write to him about somethin' else. And I'm right down ashamed that I'm so worthless, Nancy, and can't help you more. But I overheard Vonner talkin' to that Hank Snikes last evenin'. Vonner has been robbin' you, all right; and he told Hank as how they had to start this war to cover their tracks and make it look like Fraysig had been rustlin' your stock. That town banker is in it, too. That's all I know. If we had more help, we might do somethin'."

"I thought Phil Droten would side with us," Billy Lorn put in. "He seemed like a decent sort o' man."

"He fooled me, too," Old Cy admitted. "He was right nice to me in town, and asked Vonner to give me a job. There ain't anything for us to do now, I reckon, except sit pretty and watch what happens. Don't you worry, Nancy! It'll all come out right. Folks won't believe that you wanted this fightin'. I wish that I could do somethin'. I ain't much good as a fightin' father, I reckon."

Lee Woo informed them that breakfast was ready, and they went in to eat. When they came into the front room again, Billy Lorn went to a window and looked out.

"The men are down by the bunk house," he reported. "Our guards have been changed. Droten is guardin' us now."

"Then I'm goin' out to talk to him," Old Cy declared. "You other folks stay in here."

He opened the door and walked out on the little front porch and closed the door behind him. Droten saw him and hurried forward.

"Don't come down off that porch!" Droten warned.

"Then you come up here. I crave to talk to you," Old Cy replied.

Droten walked slowly to the bottom of the steps, and Old Cy sat down on the top step and made himself comfortable.

"Son, I'm right astonished at you," said Old Cy. "I thought that you was a proper sort o' man. I never believed that you'd set yourself up agin' a nice little girl like Nancy, and join up with a gang o' scoundrels."

"No?" Droten asked.

"No!" replied Old Cy. "Ain't you ashamed o' yourself, boy? And it'll be the ruin of you! The truth's got to come out some time. That man Vonner may have promised you a lot, but that ain't sayin' that he'll keep his promises."

Droten smiled at him. "Old-timer, you ought to have some sense," he said. "A lot o' good I'd be doin' the girl if I was cooped up in that house a prisoner like all of you! Where I am, I can keep my eyes and ears open and learn somethin', and maybe do her some good."

"Boy! You meanin' that you're really with us?" Old Cy exclaimed.

"Anybody but an idiot would know it!" Droten said. "I'm gettin' an earful about Vonner's affairs. I'll have some mighty valuable information to give you soon. So tell Nancy, and don't pay any attention to what I say or do."

"Son, I'd take off my hat to you if I had one on," Old Cy declared. "Gosh, but I feel relieved! I was commencin' to lose my faith in my judgment o' men. But what c'n we do? The girl is almost crazy."

"Do nothin'!" Droten advised. "She'll come out all right in the end. I'll try to slip you a couple o' guns durin' the day, for you and Billy Lorn. But I've got to be careful. If Vonner gets suspicious o' me, I won't be of much value to you."

"We'll feel a lot better if we've got guns. You reckon that the outfits are goin' to mix?" Wapper asked.

"I don't see how it can be helped,

Cy," the other replied. "Vonner and Hank Snikes started to town last night. Vonner came back alone at daylight, sayin' that Fraysig's men had ambushed 'em and killed Hank. That'll sure start the fight right. Fraysig will be wild when he hears it."

"Meanin', o' course, that Fraysig's men didn't do the killin',' Old Cy said. "From what I overheard last night, it'd be like Vonner to do it."

"That's what I'm thinkin', Cy. You pay attention, now! I've got to do some actin'. They're watchin' me." He backed away and took out his six-gun. "You get back into that house!" he cried. "I'm sick o' listenin' to you!"

Old Cy did some acting himself. He got up and brandished a fist and howled, and then turned and went into the house. Droten walked a short distance away from the porch, and Sam Vonner hurried across to him.

"What's the row, Droten?" he asked.

"Old Cy was tryin' to spill some stuff into my ears, Sam," Droten replied. "He was sayin' that he really was with us, and went over to the girl's side so's he could report to us all that was bein' planned by them in the house."

"Just what I suspected," Vonner said. "I had an understandin' with the old boy last night. Did he have anything to say?"

"Only that the girl is about crazy. They aren't makin' any plans yet," Phil replied.

"You keep good watch, Droten!" said Sam. "Sing out if you need any help, and some of the boys will come. I'm goin' to catch a little sleep."

Sam Vonner hurried down the slope and disappeared into the bunk house. Phil Droten walked back and forth in front of the ranch house, and now and then marched all the way around it. And once he heard somebody tapping on a windowpane as he passed, and looked up to see Nancy at the window.

"Cy has told me," she said. "I want to ask you to forgive me for doubting you."

"Sure I'll forgive you, Nancy! I suppose that it did look bad. I didn't have a chance to tell you what I wanted to do," Phil replied.

"For you, a stranger, to try to help when——" she began.

"I am not any stranger, and it makes me mad to be called one," Phil Droten interrupted. "Didn't I save your life when the mules ran away? I reckon that I took a fancy to you when I first saw you, Nancy. You're the kind of a girl dad would like. He owns a big ranch down Texas way. But I like to get out and see the country."

"I meant what I said last night about making you foreman of the Circle P," she told him. "But you won't want the job, I suppose, if your father has a big ranch."

"Why not?" he asked. "It isn't the wages. I c'n have plenty of money from dad any time. But I like to be workin'. I wouldn't be a bit surprised but what I'd take that foreman's job. First thing, though, is to get rid of the pesky foreman that you've got already."

"I wish that we could get word to Fraysig, and stop the trouble,"

"I have been thinkin' o' that," Phil said. "You just leave it to me. You amuse yourself with Old Cy and Billy Lorn. Play that piano and sing, and act like you were gettin' along fine. And do me a favor, Nancy—don't worry!"

CHAPTER XII.

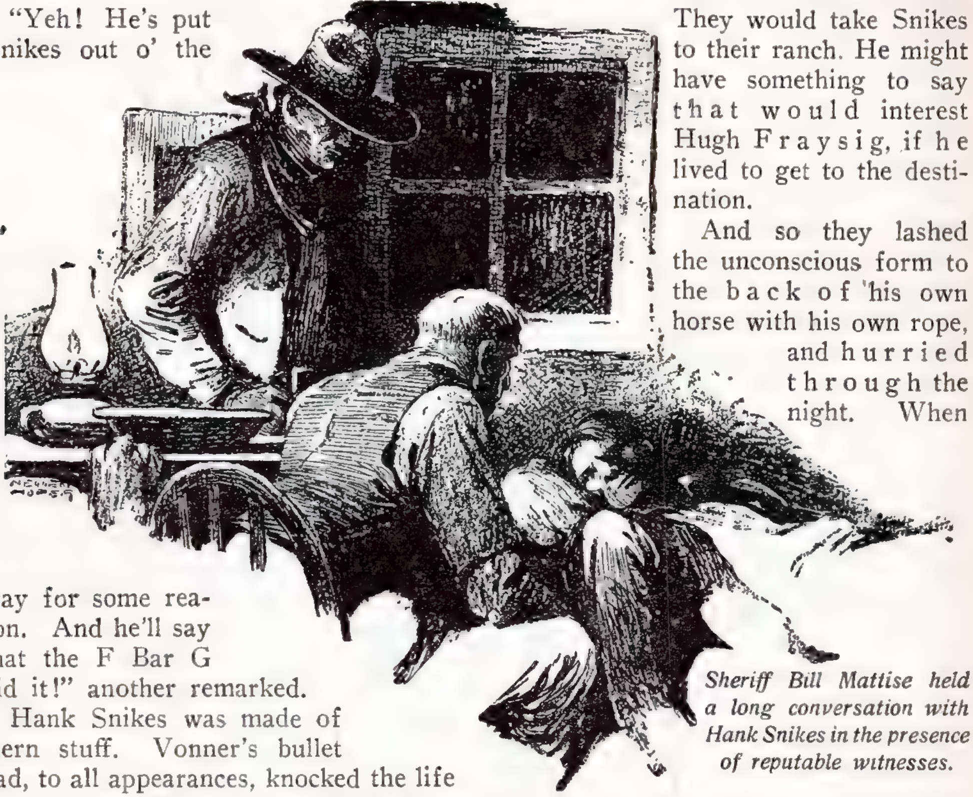
DROTEN GOES TO THE ENEMY.

WHEN Sam Vonner shot down Hank Snikes, two of the F Bar G punchers had been less than a quarter of a mile away. Fraysig had sent them to watch the trail.

They heard the report of Vonner's gun, and approached the spot warily. They saw Vonner disappear in the distance against the moon-brightened sky, and they found Hank Snikes in the middle of the trail. Snikes' horse had galloped away, but now had returned and was standing near.

"It's Snikes!" one of the Fraysig punchers exclaimed. "And I think that was Sam Vonner ridin' toward the town."

"Yeh! He's put Snikes out o' the way for some reason. And he'll say that the F Bar G did it!" another remarked.



Sheriff Bill Mattise held a long conversation with Hank Snikes in the presence of reputable witnesses.

Hank Snikes was made of stern stuff. Vonner's bullet had, to all appearances, knocked the life out of him. Vonner had believed so when he had made his investigation after firing the shot. At any rate something had kept him from firing again into the prostrate body—perhaps his eagerness to be gone from the vicinity.

And so, as the F Bar G men bent over him, Hank Snikes stirred and groaned. He felt himself lifted, felt water on his face as one of the men tilted his canteen over it. A few minutes later, Hank Snikes was able to talk.

He learned the identity of the men who had found him.

"Vonner did it!" he said, weakly. "And I—I'll be even with him! Miss Nancy didn't want a fight. It was Vonner. He's got the girl a prisoner in the ranch house——"

Extensive conversation was denied Hank Snikes, however, on account of his weakness. The F Bar G punchers made a swift decision. They would take Snikes to their ranch. He might have something to say that would interest Hugh Fraysig, if he lived to get to the destination.

And so they lashed the unconscious form to the back of his own horse with his own rope, and hurried through the night. When they reached the F Bar G ranch, Hugh Fraysig was still awake, making plans for the warfare he expected.

Hank Snikes received what ministration the F Bar G could give him, which was enough to bring him back to consciousness again. He was more than willing to talk.

"I—I've got mine, Fraysig!" he said. "I may last a few hours, and maybe a day, but no longer. I want you to get Vonner for me! He double crossed me, the skunk."

"Tell me all you can, Hank," Fraysig begged.

"He's got Nancy a prisoner," the other replied. "She don't want to fight. Almost all the men are with Vonner. He's been lootin' the ranch—him and Tragman. I was to get mine for helpin' them. And I got a bullet in the back."

"Tell me more—all that you can!" Fraysig ordered.

Hank Snikes told it in snatches, stopping now and then to groan with pain. He told how Vonner and Tragman had dealt with a crooked cattle-buyer, and named the buyer. He explained all he knew about the financial deals in the bank. And then he lost consciousness again, and Hugh Fraysig walked out on the porch and told his assembled punchers what he had learned.

"Vonner's at the bottom of the whole thing," he said. "He wanted a war to cover his tracks. He'd try to make everybody believe that we started it, that we'd rustled Circle P beef. That girl don't want a fight! She's all right. It's Vonner we've got to deal with!"

"Let's go over and clean him out!" a man cried.

"And start the war we're tryin' to avoid," Fraysig said. "We would play right into his hands if we did that. I've got a better plan. Burke, saddle the fastest horse on the place. You're goin' to ride to the county seat to the sheriff. I'll write a letter while you're gettin' ready!"

And so Burke, the best rider on the F Bar G, went swiftly through the night on the outfit's best horse, clouds of dust rising in his wake, sparks flying from his horse's hoofs. Down hills he rode, and up hills, through little cañons, across treacherous gravel slopes. On and on Burke went, making what speed he could.

He got to the county seat an hour after daylight, and routed out the sheriff. The official read Fraysig's letter, and asked a few questions. Then he waved Burke aside, and hurried out.

Soon thereafter, one by one, men commenced gathering in a grove at the edge of the town. They were hardy and determined-looking men, such as are to be found in a posse of the better class. Burke got a fresh horse, and joined them.

Out from the county seat they rode, with Sheriff Bill Mattise at their head. Their pace was swift and steady, eating up the miles. Up hills and down hills, through cañons, across gravel slopes as Burke had ridden, they went back toward the F Bar G.

The sheriff had Burke riding beside him in the lead.

"It's breakin' just right, Burke," he said. "I've had my suspicions of Vonner for some time. I've had suspicions of Fraysig, too. He's a mean cuss, but I guess that he wouldn't start a range war. We'll get Vonner and his men, and there'll be an end of the fight!"

And on they rode, through the sweltering sun of midday, up into the cooler hills. Finally, they saw the buildings of the F Bar G in the distance, and galloped down a well-worn trail to the yard of the ranch house, where they dismounted.

"Fraysig is out somewhere, sheriff," George Ramberg, the F Bar G foreman, said. "He'll be back soon, I reckon. Hank is conscious again, if you want to talk to him."

Sheriff Bill Mattise went inside and held a long conversation with Hank Snikes, with reputable witnesses present. The official got accurate data as Hank unfolded the story of Sam Vonner's treachery. And then, having laid the foundation for his revenge, he turned his face away, and died.

Over at the Circle P, Droten had been relieved for half an hour by another puncher. He managed to get Billy Lorn's and Old Cy's guns and slip them down inside his chaps. He could not conceal the holsters, but he did fill his pockets with cartridges.

And then he went back to guard duty, watched for his opportunity, and slipped guns and cartridges through a window. Shortly after that, Sam Vonner came from the bunk house, talked to his men, and then went up to Droten.

"They haven't made a move, Sam, except to play that confounded piano and try to sing," Droten reported. "I'm right down sick o' this job."

"I'll call a man to relieve you," Vonner said. "There's a poker game goin' in the bunk house."

"I don't want to play poker when there's a war on," Droten complained. "I'd like to saddle my hoss and go scoutin'."

"You might ride over toward the F Bar G and take a look," Vonner told him. "We've been watchin' the hill, but the boys haven't sent us any signal. Fraysig may make a move to-night."

Phil Droten caught up his horse and saddled him, mounted, and rode away from the corral. He stopped beside Vonner and obtained directions about trails. Then he rode down a dry watercourse and emerged from it some distance away, and disappeared over a rise in the land.

He swung to the left and finally came to a well-traveled trail. Here he gave the horse the spurs, and made better speed. As a scout, Phil Droten was not a success. He made no effort to shield his movements. He might have been riding in his own territory instead of the land of the enemy.

He dashed through a small grove of stunted trees, and saw two riders in the near distance—Hugh Fraysig and an F Bar G puncher. Droten shouted at them, and held up his hand as he rode forward. Fraysig recognized him instantly. But, despite Droten's peace sign, he whipped out his gun and covered the Circle P man.

"Put 'em up, Droten!" he cried. "What are you doin' here?"

"Lookin' for you," Droten replied.

"And for trouble also?"

"Got trouble enough now," Droten replied. "Just forget that little clash we had in Sunglare, Fraysig. That really was your fault, and you know it. There's bigger things to think about."

"Have your say," Fraysig offered.

"I want to give you the rights o' the situation at the Circle P, Fraysig. I didn't know anything about the outfit when I signed on—just took the first job that was offered. And I'm glad now that I did."

"Suppose you talk about somethin' important," Fraysig said

"All right!" Phil said. "Nancy Plake don't want a war, Fraysig. It's all Vonner's doin's. Vonner's keepin' her a prisoner in the ranch house, so she can't interfere. All the men have sided with Vonner except Old Cy and Billy Lorn. I pretended to, so I'd have a chance to help Nancy Plake."

"And why are they all sidin' with Vonner against the owner?"

"Vonner's been lootin' the ranch," Phil continued. "Tragman, the Sunglare banker, has been helpin' him. I've learned that much. Vonner and Hank Snikes started to town last night, and Vonner came back with the story that Hank had been ambushed and shot by your men. Old Cy and I think Vonner shot Hank himself, because he knew too much."

"Old Cy and you are right," Hugh Fraysig said. "I happen to know Hank wasn't killed outright. Two o' my men found him and brought him in, and he's been able to talk. You're tellin' the same story that he told, Droten."

"There's nobody to help Nancy except Cy and Billy Lorn," Droten said. "I slipped away and rode here to tell you, so that you wouldn't attack the ranch and play Vonner's hand for him. He knows that a big fuss will cover his tracks. He'll make everybody think the F Bar G has been stealin' Circle P stock——"

"I've got it all, from Hank," Fraysig interrupted. "Ride along with us, Droten. I reckon I can forget that little affair we had in town, under the circumstances. I'm glad to see that you're the right sort of young man. I've sent for the sheriff."

"Sent for the sheriff!" Droten cried. "Good enough!"

"He'll be here soon, if he isn't already. I told him to bring a posse along, and attend to Vonner," the other continued.

"But we've got to do somethin' for Nancy," Droten said.

"Ain't I doin' enough for her, bringin' the sheriff to handle Vonner?" Fraysig inquired.

"That'll settle Vonner, but it won't get her money back. And sendin' Tragman to jail might not get it back," Phil suggested.

"Whereas," said Fraysig, "it might be scared out of that old skinflint of a Tragman. I never did like the man! Let's ride to the house and see what the sheriff has to say."

They galloped around the base of a hill and saw the F Bar G buildings in the distance.

"Posse is there!" Fraysig said. "Look at the horses. I hope that Vonner gang don't get wise and sneak away!"

As they neared the ranch house, George Ramberg mounted and galloped toward them. He stopped in surprise when he saw Droten.

"Everything's all right, George!" Hugh Fraysig said. "Ride back and send the sheriff out here."

CHAPTER XIII.

A FINANCIAL DEAL.

SHERIFF BILL MATTISE was no weakling, nor was he a man to dodge physical effort when duty called. Therefore, he said nothing when he decided that he would have to ride to Sunglare with Phil Droten.

He ordered the posse to put up their horses at the F Bar G, and told Fraysig to make the men comfortable.

"We'll start for the Circle P to-morrow at daybreak," the sheriff said. "You men stay close until I get back."

Sheriff Mattise and Phil Droten rode into Sunglare about four o'clock in the afternoon. They went directly to the bank, and found James Tragman locking the front door.

"Open up again, Tragman," the sheriff ordered. "We've got something to talk to you about."

James Tragman, like so many of his ilk, was wanting in courage. He pretended an ordinary greeting, with an oily smile upon his face, yet his heart was hammering at his ribs as he unlocked the door and ushered the two men inside. He conducted them to the little rear room and waved them toward chairs, then sat down himself. The sheriff sat down and lighted a cigar. Droten remained standing.

"This man's name is Phil Droten," the sheriff said. "He belongs to the Circle P."

"Ah, yes!" Tragman said. "I have been told that there is another range war breaking out. Terrible thing! I understand that the Fraysig men have shot down Hank Snikes, and——"

"Sam Vonner shot Hank Snikes;" Droten interrupted. "But Hank wasn't killed outright."

"Not—not killed?" Tragman gasped. His face turned white as an evidence of his terror.

"Not killed outright. But he is dead now," Droten told him. "A couple of F Bar G men picked him up and carried him to the ranch. He was able to talk, Tragman."

"Poor man! Such violence!" Tragman said.

"Stop acting, Tragman!" Droten replied.

"What do you mean, sir?" inquired the banker.

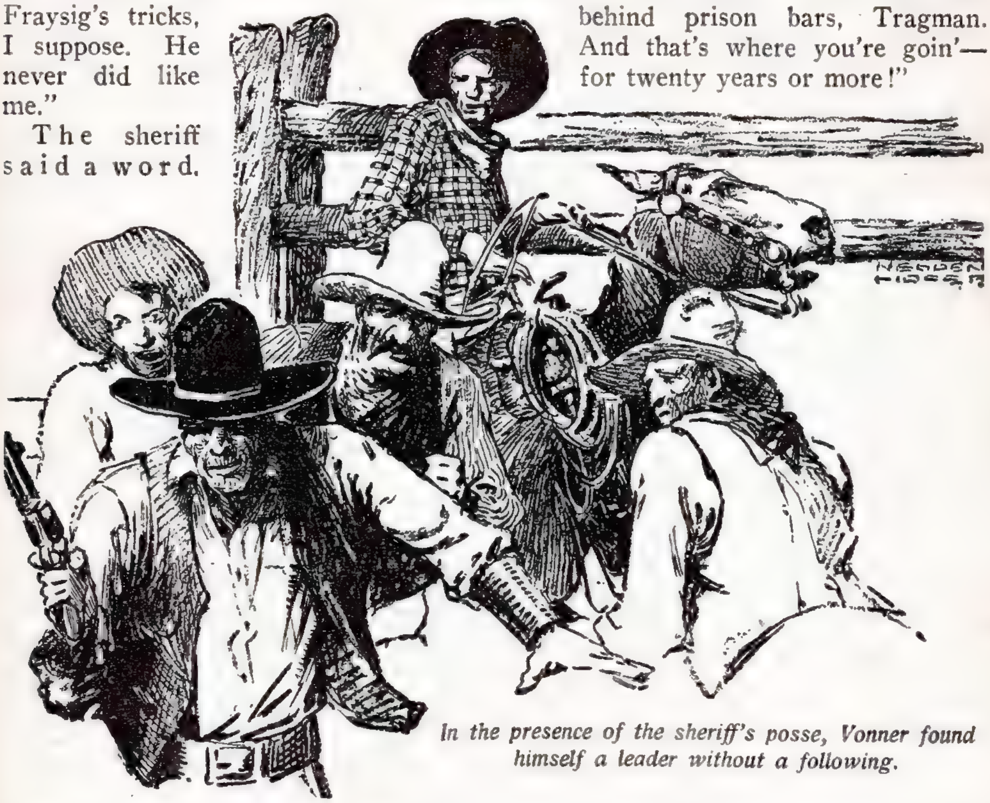
"I said that Hank Snikes was able to talk," Phil told him. "He told how you and Sam Vonner have been lootin' the Circle P."

"What's that? Looting the ranch?" Tragman cried. "Nonsense! To whom did he say such a thing?'

"He told them at the F Bar G," said Phil.

"You mean that Fraysig says Hank told them," Tragman corrected. "It is another of Fraysig's tricks, I suppose. He never did like me."

The sheriff said a word.



In the presence of the sheriff's posse, Vonner found himself a leader without a following.

"Hank also told me, Tragman," he said. "He made a deathbed confession in front of reputable witnesses, gentlemen from the county seat, allied to neither ranch."

"And—and what was it that he said?" the banker asked.

"You know what he said!" Phil Droten thundered. "We've got Sam Vonner in a corner, Tragman! He's goin' on trial for murder! You know Vonner well. Think that he's the kind of man to keep his mouth shut and save a pal?"

"I—I don't understand," the banker faltered.

"You understand, all right!" Droten said. "Hank spilled the beans. Vonner is at the end of his rope. We've got Vonner where we want him, and we've got you, Tragman! Steal from a woman, would you? Betray the trust of a sick man? You'll look fine behind prison bars, Tragman. And that's where you're goin'—for twenty years or more!"

James Tragman was not constructed of stern stuff; and he was cursed with imagination. Mention of prison bars called up a vision before him.

"No, no!" he cried. "I don't know anything about it!"

"How about the crooked cattle-buyer?" Droten asked.

"How about sellin' a thousand steers and reportin' only five hundred?" snapped the sheriff.

"How about swindlin' Nancy Plake in financial dealin's, and on interest?" Droten demanded. "We've got you, Tragman! I'm actin' as a friend of Miss Plake's."

James Tragman was on the verge of collapse. He had slumped down in his chair. His face was white, and his hands were trembling. The statements of this young man and the sheriff were enough to convince him that they knew everything.

"What—do you want me—to do?" he managed to ask.

"Tell the truth!" the sheriff thundered. "How much did you steal, you thief?"

"I won't talk! I——"

"Suits me!" Sheriff Bill Mattise reached in a pocket and brought out a pair of handcuffs. "I'd a lot rather take you to jail than listen to you talk. You can tell it to judge and jury."

"But, if I talk——" the banker suggested.

"Get out your books! Figure it out! Make restitution to Nancy Plake," the sheriff said. "Do it right now, Tragman. Then you can turn State's evidence against Vonner. We've got him cinched on the murder charge but the motive will have to be shown. That's where you'll be mixed up in it."

"And then I'll—go free?" Tragman asked.

"That is up to the courts" the sheriff said. "But I can tell you this—if you don't do as we say there'll be more than a charge of swindling and theft against you. Snikes was murdered you know. You're an accessory."

Tragman gave a cry of fear. "I didn't have anything to do with it!" he cried.

"Snikes was killed so he couldn't talk, Tragman! And you advised Vonner to start the range war to cover your crooked dealings. We've got all kinds of evidence. Vonner told Droten that you were in it as deep as he was."

James Tragman, hunched in his chair, was scarcely able to talk. Abject terror had seized him. Sheriff Bill Mattise curled his lip as he looked at the man. As may be the case with a sly but weak man, Tragman, when the crash came, completely lost his self-control.

The sheriff knew that he was going to undue lengths in this affair. But law and justice were not administered in that out-of-the-way county as in places where the population was more dense, and men were more particular. He would arrange to drop the case against Tragman if the banker made restitution and got out of the country. He did not need Tragman to convict Vonner.

"Well, Tragman, what is it to be?" the official asked. "Do you know how much you and Vonner have stolen from Miss Plake?"

"Yes. I know—to the last cent. I've got it down in a personal book," the banker replied.

"And you've got the money, I suppose?" asked the sheriff.

"Yes. I—I hadn't divided with Vonner yet," Tragman stated.

"Probably fixing to double cross him," the sheriff commented. "Give me the figures, Tragman! Pay over the money, every cent of it!"

"It isn't here. I always send surplus to the city," the banker told him.

"Give me an order for it, Tragman. Make it out right now! And then call in your directors, hold a meeting, and tell them that you've got to go away for your health. And you'd better start your trip mighty soon! You'd better be gone within twenty-four hours, Tragman!"

"And—if I am——?" the banker questioned.

"In that case, I'll probably be too busy to hunt for you," said Sheriff Bill Mattise.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEVERAL SOLUTIONS.

THE absence of Phil Droten had worried Sam Vonner considerably. He raged throughout the night. He sent out scouts, but they returned without information. Droten, Vonner supposed, had been captured by the F Bar G men, or else slain. And Vonner had depended upon Droten helping greatly in the fight that he felt was coming.

The fact that the Fraysig men had made no move bothered him, too. He got little sleep during the night. He was up at the first streak of dawn, as were his men. And, less than an hour later, he saw a column of smoke rising from the top of a hill in the distance.

"The signal!" Vonner cried. "They're comin'!"

He rushed about the place, shouting orders. He left one man to guard the house and those in it. Old Cy made his appearance and demanded to know what all the fuss was about, and was told. He retreated back into the house.

Nancy Plake had heard stories of range wars. She could remember one. And now she visualized battle, wounded men, slain horses, stock destroyed and possibly buildings burned. She watched from a window as Vonner galloped here and there, placing his men. He did not dare send them far afield, for he did not know from which direction the enemy would strike.

"I don't see Phil," Old Cy complained, as he stood beside the girl. "He rode away yesterday afternoon, and I ain't seen him since."

"Oh! Maybe he went for help," Nancy said. "If he could stop Fraysig in time——! But he hasn't done that, I suppose. If he had, Vonner wouldn't be getting ready for battle. He must know that the enemy is coming."

"I'm right down sure that Phil is doin' something good," said Old Cy. "He's a good boy, Phil is. If I was a young woman, I reckon that I'd look at him more'n once."

"I hope he'll make a good foreman," Nancy said. "I told him that he could have the job."

"I'm dead willin' to work under him, whether he's foreman or got some bigger title," Old Cy announced.

They heard Vonner shouting at his men again. In the distance, coming over the mesa, horsemen appeared. Breathlessly, they watched them advance, tried to count them.

"Not more'n fifteen," Billy Lorn declared. "They ought to be able to put up a good fight, though."

"But we don't want a fight," Nancy said. "Oh, I wish that we could stop it! Isn't there any way?"

"Cy and me have got our guns," said Billy. "We could go out the front door shootin', but we'd never land Vonner and all the men before we got ours."

"That would be fighting, wouldn't it?" she asked. "Isn't there any way we can stop it all?"

"I reckon that you'd better come away from the window, Miss Nancy," Old Cy told her. "It won't be a pretty sight. And a bullet might come through the window and hit you."

Billy Lorn uttered an exclamation of surprise. "What's the matter with the fools?" he cried.

"Well, what is the matter?" Old Cy wanted to know.

"They're not lookin' for cover at all. They're comin' straight on toward the ranch."

Sam Vonner was thinking the same thing at that instant. There seemed to be no idea in the minds of the advancing horsemen to seek cover. Vonner feared a trick—feared another force attacking him from behind while his attention was distracted.

"That's not the F Bar G men!" shouted a puncher from near the front gate. "Ride here, Vonner! That's the sheriff and a posse!"

Sam Vonner sent forth a volley of curses, and galloped toward the gate.

"That cowardly cur of a Fraysig has sent for him, I suppose," Vonner shouted. "Afraid to fight us! Keep 'em away from the house, boys, if you can. I'll try to get 'em away before they can learn much. We're just ready, afraid that Fraysig and his men will come at us, remember. We're defendin' ourselves, not attackin'."

He stopped his horse a few feet from the gate and remained there. On came the posse, with Sheriff Bill Mattise in the lead. The morning sun's rays were reflected from the star on his vest front. The sheriff was advertising his identity.

"Stop right there!" Vonner ordered, when the posse was only fifty yards away.

The posse did not stop; it came on, slowly and deliberately.

"You, Bill Mattise! I said to stop!" Vonner cried.

"I want to talk to you, Vonner," the sheriff said.

"Do it from a distance, then," Vonner replied. "Helpin' the Fraysig gang fight their battles, are you? That what you were elected for?"

"There isn't an F Bar G man in this bunch, Vonner. This is a posse from the county seat," the sheriff told him.

"So Fraysig sent to the county seat for help, did he?" Vonner asked.

"He sent for me, and I came. But not because of any range war, Vonner," the sheriff said.

"Sounds pretty!" Sam Vonner sneered. "I c'n see through your trick, all right. You'll turn into Fraysig men quick enough, if I let you come too close."

Sheriff Bill Mattise had continued to ride forward, and his men rode behind him. Their steady advance unnerved Vonner.

"I told you to stop!" he cried. "If you don't——"

"Put up your gun, Vonner!" Mattise called. "I've come to get you."

"For what?" the other asked.

"You didn't kill Hank Snikes outright, Vonner. He lived long enough to talk. And Tragman has talked, too!" the sheriff explained.

For an instant, Sam Vonner was as a man struck dumb. Billy Lorn and Old Cy, seeing that this was a posse instead of punchers of a belligerent outfit, had stepped out upon the porch. Vonner's men were watching from cover.

And suddenly there came to Sam Vonner a full realization of what this meant. Hank Snikes had lived—and talked. Tragman had talked!

"It's a trick, men!" Vonner cried. "They won't take me! They're workin' for Fraysig! At 'em, men!"

He threw up his gun—and fired. The bullet went wild. None of his men helped him by opening fire. Suddenly he was a leader without a following. And before he could fire again, Sheriff Mattise jumped his horse forward and crashed against the former foreman of the Circle P, and felled him.

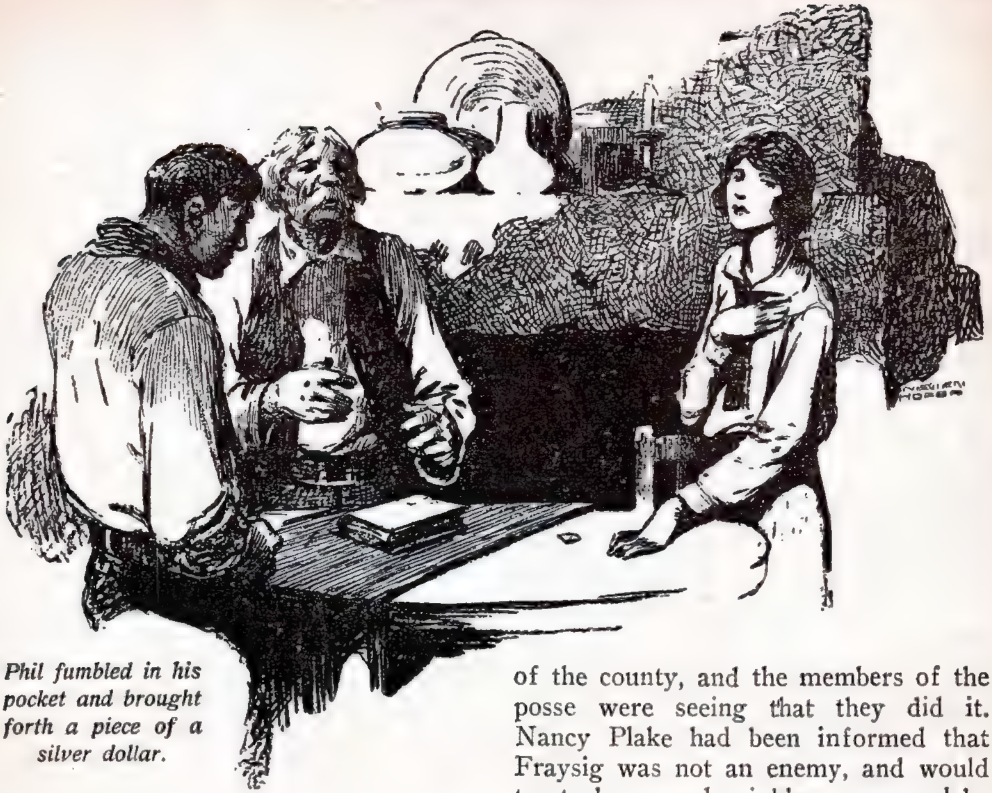
Half a dozen riders surrounded Vonner as he got to his feet. Other members of the posse scattered and commenced rounding up Vonner's men.

"You're done, Vonner," the sheriff said. "You won't start any range war to cover your other crimes. And Hank is dead—so there's a murder charge against you."

Vonner's gun had flown from his hand. He saw it on the ground a dozen feet away, saw a member of the posse pick it up. He saw the sheriff and two other men dismounting and preparing to advance upon him. And then he saw Phil Droten dismounting.

"So!" Sam Vonner shouted. "You—Droten! You brought the posse, did you?"

"The sheriff did it as much as me," Droten declared.



Phil fumbled in his pocket and brought forth a piece of a silver dollar.

Vonner lurched toward one of the dismounted men. An instant later he sprang, jerked a weapon from the hand of the nearest, and turned to fire.

Droten had only one foot on the ground. He was in no position to draw. A scream of warning came from Nancy Plake, who was watching now from the porch. Came also the roar of a weapon.

Sam Vonner dropped the gun. A look of surprise flashed into his face, then an expression of wonder. His body sagged to one side, and then crashed to the ground.

"He came danged near gettin' Phil," said Old Cy Wapper, as he advanced. "But this old gun o' mine got in her work just in time."

Sheriff Bill Mattise was a man of quick decisions and actions. Half an hour later, he had accomplished several things. Vonner's men had been rounded up, told to pack and get out of the county, and the members of the posse were seeing that they did it. Nancy Plake had been informed that Fraysig was not an enemy, and would try to be a good neighbor now; and he would lend her punchers in the place of the men ordered away, until she could hire a new crew of her own.

"And I reckon that's all," the sheriff said. "I'll be gettin' back to the county seat. We'll take Vonner's body along. Considerin' everything, it's the best way. And we've averted a nasty range war, I reckon."

"You don't know how glad I am!" Nancy said.

"Huh! You don't know how glad the sheriff is," said that official. "A nasty range war wouldn't have been any vacation for me. Phil, did you give her that little paper we got from Tragman?"

"Gosh, sheriff, I forgot it!"

"Give it to her," Mattise ordered. "Nancy, this young man backed Tragman up against a wall and made him write an order for all the money he and Vonner stole from you. I reckon you're in pretty good shape financially."

"Goin' to keep Old Cy here?" the sheriff asked Nancy. I'm glad! Old Cy came to me in the county seat couple or three days ago, and explained everything. Showed me your dad's letter, Nancy, and said he would smell around and see if there was anything wrong. It didn't take him long to find out that there was. I knew what he was up to all the time."

Mattise turned to see that his men were gathering for the journey back to the county seat, then faced them again.

"What you goin' to do for a foreman now, Nancy?" he asked.

"I have one," she replied, glancing at Droten.

"Oh! Like that, huh? You know, Nancy, I don't think much of Droten's and Old Cy's judgment in some matters. The first day they was on this range, for instance, they both cottoned to Sam Vonner, who was a scoundrel. And they both quarreled with Hugh Fraysig, who's a bellowin' brute half the time but really ain't as bad as the noise he makes. And now I sure have to ride—the men are waitin'. See you later!"

Sam Vonner's men had ridden away. The sheriff and his posse disappeared. Mrs. Beens and Lee Woo, who had remained very much in the background, now came forth and breathed easier.

"Well, it wasn't much of a muss!" said Billy Lorn.

"Muss enough, without any bloodshed," Droten declared. "But we straightened it out, I reckon. You ought to have seen Tragman—if you had, you'd know now what a man looks like when he's really scared."

"Thank Heaven, it is over!" Nancy said. "And I've got one fighting father, at least. Old Cy is going to make this his home as long as he lives. If the other fighting father shows up now, he'll be too late to do any good."

"Oh, that reminds me!" Droten exclaimed. "Did you ever see anything like this?"

He fumbled in a pocket—and brought forth a piece of a silver dollar.

"Where did you get that?" Nancy demanded.

"Dad! His name is Stalman, and so is mine. Dad got his letter from your father, all right. He was laid up with a broken leg—horse threw him. So he sent me in his place. Called myself Droten because I wanted to take a quiet look around and see how things were. That's why Cy didn't know me. And I didn't know Cy under the name o' Wapper. Dad told me his real name, you see."

"So you—you are my other fighting father!" Nancy cried.

Phil smiled. "Don't want to be your father!" he declared. "If I'm goin' to be any relationship, I'll tell you later what it'll be—after I've handled that foreman's job a while and we're better acquainted!"

The Devil's Post Pile.

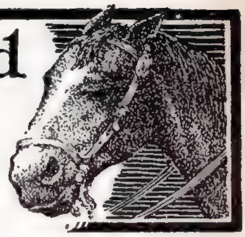
WHAT is probably the strangest pile of rocks in the world lies in California just outside the boundaries of the Yosemite National Park, in the hinterland of the high Sierra. Naturalists have puzzled over the odd rock formation without solving the strange geological problem it presents even in this high mountain land of natural wonders.

Long, perpendicular shafts of rock, very, very straight, are massed together in a way that suggests an unusual symmetrical precision at the hands of some unseen force. Every shaft measures almost identically the same, and the long straight pieces are precisely hexagonal, for all the world like a great bundle of slate pencils stacked for the use of the giants.

Just a Gotch-eared Buckskin Bronc

BY

Harley P. Lathrop



I

He was just a broke-down puncher,
Grizzled and old and worn
With rusty boots, a crushed-in hat,
And chaps that were frayed and torn.
The eyes in his head were a faded blue,
Crinkled from sunshine's glare;
His face was seamed, and his back was bent
From the weight of toil and care.

II

He was leadin' a gotch-eared buckskin
With a mild, deceptive eye
That apparently lacked the ambition
To lay himself down and die.
A bone yard pure and simple
Long years past tryin' to run;
So when the stranger entered his hoss,
We thought he was makin' fun.

III

The race was the county sweepstakes,
—I most forgot to explain—
Where the glory is great if you finish first,
Not countin' the cash you gain.
And the hoss that wins by a whisker,
—For they seldom win by a head—
Has got to cover a measured mile
With the speed of flyin' lead.

IV

The old man peeled off his entrance fee
From a roll that would choke a bull,
Removed his coat, threw down his hat,
Then give his saddle a pull.
"If any you folks feel wishful to bet,"
He said in a tired way,
"Crack down with your wad right pronto,
"And I'll try and see your play."

V

You've heard of robbin' cradles?
Man, it looked easy as that,
So we bet him to a standstill
Plumb down to his coat and hat.
It seemed like an o'nery thing to do
To strip the old man bare,
But some of us never stopped to think,
And some of us didn't care.

VI

Well, they fiddled about at the startin' line—
You know how it generally goes,
With part of them fightin' and rearin' back
And part of them on their toes,
Except that the gotch-eared buckskin,
Head hangin' and feet braced wide,
Stood like he didn't care a rap
Whether he lived or died.

VII

But a lightnin' change came over him
When the pistol give its crack,
Like a shot the buckskin left the bunch
With the old man gazin' back
At all the rest behind him
Who were tryin' to match the pace,
And he still set there a-lookin', what's more,
At the finish of the race.

VIII

Now there's this to be learned from what you've read,
It's as plain as plain can be:
Appearances is deceivin' boys,
For look what happened to me.
It wasn't what money the old man won,
I never begrudged him that,
But I hated the ten-mile ride back home,
Minus my coat and hat.

LAST CHANCE SALOON

Men Who Paid

By

H. C. WIRE

IT was not to be supposed that the execution of George Ives would pass off without grim retaliation by his friends. They had not been bold enough to take him from the men who did the hanging, but they could mark those men for a similar death.

So the embryo Vigilantes, still loosely organized and bound only by individual determination to rid Montana of all outlaws, found themselves being ambushed one by one. Sam Goff was the first, killed behind the counter of his store in Virginia City. On the next night Les Palmer was shot while sitting at supper with his family. Both murders were done in the dark, through a window or an open door.

Captain Jim Williams, temporarily the Vigilantes' leader, saw at once that they could do nothing without a death list of their own. He called a meeting in Virginia City and standing before the committee which now numbered twenty-eight, he admitted their efforts were near defeat.

"You don't know whether your neighbor, even, is a friend or an enemy," he concluded. "Half the strangers you meet between here and Nevada City are road agents—waiting for one of us! Unless we get a list of their names we might as well move out."

No one in the group accused Jim Williams of being a coward. He was not a large man, being several inches under six feet, spare in build and usually went smooth shaven, which made him seem much younger than his age which was fifty-five years. Yet he had proved himself a fighter since the first moment he was able to pack a gun, and now the men knew he was still the relentless champion of law for Montana. There was not a citizen in the Territory better fitted to lead them. But how could any man fight when his enemies were unknown?

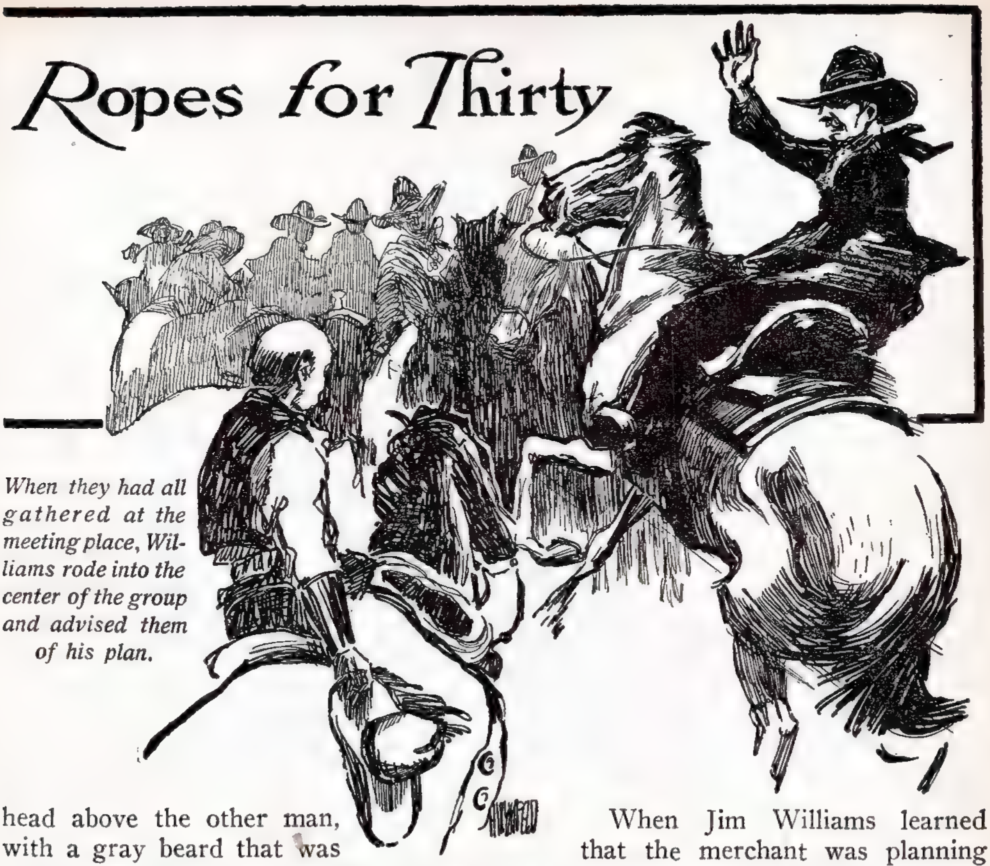
"We've got to get our list," he repeated, "and go after them like they're going after us. I'll leave it with you boys just that way."

Meanwhile there came a lull in the outlaws' operations, with a few days of peace in and around Virginia City. Yet Williams knew the sign.

It meant something big was being planned. The very feel of it was in the atmosphere of tense waiting which hung over little groups of men gathered in saloons, and in the fact that no more Vigilantes were shot from ambush.

Then, during this lull, Lloyd Magruder, a merchant who had cleaned up fourteen thousand dollars in Virginia City, decided to carry the money back to his home in Lewiston, Idaho. He was one of Jim Williams' friends, and the two were often on the street together; Magruder tall and straight, a

Ropes for Thirty



When they had all gathered at the meeting place, Williams rode into the center of the group and advised them of his plan.

head above the other man, with a gray beard that was always neatly trimmed. He dressed well, preferring black trousers and coat set off by a vest of some bright color, and carried himself with the air of a city gentleman.

But if education and culture above the average marked him apart from the frontiersmen and gave him keen business judgment in his dealings with them, he held neither position nor business more important than genuine interest in his friends.

Here in Virginia City more than one miner had found his credit as good as his gold if he needed a grubstake from Magruder's store. Every one knew him, and before the summer passed he became a popular man in the Territory. Perhaps his generosity sometimes cut into his profits, yet fourteen thousand dollars for the summer seemed fair enough, and he was satisfied.

When Jim Williams learned that the merchant was planning to go out, he went to him at once.

"You'd better wait," he said. "Things look pretty black."

Magruder smiled. "I think I'm safe, Jim. I've had no trouble with any of the boys, and there will be five of us in the party not counting the wagon drivers."

"Put off the trip," Williams insisted. "It's been too quiet around here the last few days. There's something up, and your wagon train might catch it."

Magruder smiled and there was an eager look in his gray eyes. "I can't stop now. I've got a wife and little girl in Lewiston, and if I don't go soon I'll be snowed in for the winter. I don't want to stay away from them that long."

Williams knew it was no use arguing. "Well," he said, uttering that homely Western phrase which carried a world of meaning between friends, "take care."

"I'll be back in the spring," Magruder promised. "Because I want to be a delegate from this Territory next election, and I'll ask you folks to vote for me. I know what's needed here."

Williams' hand went firmly to his friend's shoulder. "You're the one man we'd trust as our representative," he said earnestly. "If you get us what we need, we'll have no more use for this Vigilance Committee."

The two men parted, and in a few days Magruder, with four companions and four wagon drivers, started home.

Even at the moment when the trader set out upon his homeward journey, a council meeting of a grim sort was being held in Alder Gulch some miles below town.

Alder Gulch ran far back into the hills. It could be reached by a single trail that was always guarded, and within its depths it sheltered a secret wikiup known only to men who wore a black scarf tied around their necks in a sailor's knot, and who could give the password, "Innocent."

Here in the shadows of evening, five men sat on their blanket rolls and took orders from one who stood before them. "Jem" Romaine, Billy Page, "Doc" Howard, Cyrus Skinner, and "Red" Yager. The other man, their leader, was Henry Plummer, who outside these hills was the sheriff of Virginia City.

It was a strategic position he enjoyed, for as sheriff he knew what was happening about town, and could then pick the most profitable jobs for his gang of thirty.

This evening he came with fresh plans.

"Magruder is already on the road," he said. "I've bought off his teamsters, so it's all fixed for you to take their places when they leave Bitter Root. He's carrying fourteen thousand dollars himself. The others have something; then there'll be stuff in his wagons. Finish it up before you leave; we can't have a man like Magruder coming back afterward. See?"

Four men nodded. The fifth, Red Yager, stood up, kicking his boot toe into the ashes of a camp fire.

"I'm on the rob, not on the kill," he objected.

Plummer turned to him. "What do you mean, Red?"

"I mean you can count me out of this one. Ain't I done enough shootin' the last week? Twice is a-plenty."

"All right. I was throwing a good haul your way, but if you don't want it, that's your loss. You can go back to Dempsey's ranch for awhile. If things break wrong and the Vigilantes get on the trail, I'll send you a letter and you can warn the boys. It will just say 'Black ducks are flying low.'"

At once their plans were completed, and under cover of night Plummer returned to town, Red Yager rode back to his job on Dempsey's ranch, while the four others sent their mounts southwest over a trail that would land them in Bitter Root ahead of Magruder's wagons.

Bitter Root Camp was the last station in Montana along a road which soon climbed steeply up the Bitter Root Range, wound through a pass, then dropped over into Idaho. They arrived early one morning and had to wait only until that night when Magruder's train drove in.

It was a wild night in the camp saloon—purposely so. By dawn there was not one teamster sober enough, nor willing if he had been sober, to continue the journey. Bitter Root was but a station with no extra men around to take the jobs. Fall was drawing close to winter and already the range of mountains was partly veiled in low snow clouds.

Magruder was impatient to push ahead, yet his crew continued in drunken revolt through the morning until it was evident that they would never go on. Then the difficulty was solved when four men encamped near by, apparently going toward Montana, at last agreed to return to Idaho with the wagons.

They started at noon without wasting more time. Before them rose the high peaks of the Bitter Roots, with the road winding up and up until it became a thread through the eye of the pass. They were alone at this season of the year and would probably be the last to cross before blizzards blocked the pass with snow.

For two days they drove on, mounted the slopes and came to the eastern mouth of the pass where their road skirted the brink of a deep gorge. Here, just after sunset of the second day, they halted and made camp.

That night nine men turned into their blankets when the fire died out; only four came down from the mountains at dawn.

On the road behind these four there was no sign of Magruder's wagons, nothing to betray what had happened if a late traveler should come along, while the bottom of the gorge, a thousand feet below, was too dark to reveal the mass of wreckage and five bodies.

Winter swept down across Montana with a roar of wind and snow. News went slowly. Back in Virginia City there had been no word from Magruder. Friends supposed it was because no mail had come through from Idaho, but Jim Williams was not satisfied with this explanation and sent inquiries out by every man he could trust. It was not until December that he learned the truth.

An acquaintance who had come across the lower flats of Stinkingwater Valley said a stranger was down there who rode Magruder's horse and wore Magruder's leggings. "Looks bad," this one offered. "I'd know Magruder's outfit and buckskin anywhere."

"Did you ask any questions?" said Williams.

"Poke my finger in a rattlesnake's ribs? I wasn't aimin' to eat my Christmas dinner in the next world. But when I left the Valley I noticed this stranger and three pals were taking the road up Deer Lodge Creek toward Cottonwood. Maybe they intend to lie quiet in there for a while."

That was enough information to bring sudden action from Williams. He knew that Magruder was dead and that the killers were no doubt in Cottonwood by now.

This was on the twenty-third of December. Christmas was at hand, the one day of all the year when Montana pioneers wanted most to stay near their family fires and celebrate with big dinners, good liquor, and general entertainment. Yet when Williams called the twenty-eight Vigilantes together and told them what he had learned, there was not a man who cast a dissenting vote.

"Then get your outfits ready," Williams ended. "We'll ride out of town this evening."

It was a queer assortment of men and mounts that gathered at dusk on the road below Virginia City, for the members were not in the organization because of what they owned, nor even because of how well they could shoot. Trustworthiness was what counted most.

So, in appearance, they ranged all the way from the determined figure of Captain Jim Williams, astride a fine range sorrel, to a store clerk mounted upon a borrowed mule. Weapons too were varied; some carried six-shooters, others rifles, and some only shotguns—but one thing was evident on each saddle. That was a coil of three-quarter-inch rope.

When they had all gathered at the

meeting place, Williams rode into the center of the group and advised them of his plan. Then silently, with horses' footfalls deadened by the snow-covered trail, white mist of their breath puffing into the zero night air, they headed southwest like gray shadows, single file.

Ahead were days, perhaps weeks of riding into the wintry hills. There was no offer of great reward to urge them on, no promise of glory, only a certain knowledge of death for some of them. Yet their right to live in this new country peacefully and in their own way had been challenged; that was enough.

By morning they were far beyond Virginia City, and Williams halted them for a rest. Upon taking up the trail again, he offered a suggestion.

"We'd better go in small parties," was his advice, "three or four together, strung several miles apart. If we ride in such a big bunch some one will get wise. We'll meet only at night."

Accordingly he picked a companion for himself and started in the lead, while at intervals the others came on behind him, until the last group was more than two hours back.

In this way they continued down across Stinkingwater Valley, on to Big Hole then up toward the Divide. Here in the mountains the cold grew more killing, and the pace was slower as men were often forced to walk beside their mounts to keep from freezing. Within a week they were on half rations. Feed for their horses was scarce. They fought through one blizzard only to emerge with another confronting them.

In the second week Williams saw his company could not go much farther, yet now they were on Deer Lodge Creek, with Cottonwood only a few days ahead. He felt confident that the end of their search was near, for certain camp marks along the way and information received from a miner down in the foothills, promised an immediate meeting with the four strangers.

It was here along the road up Deer Lodge Creek that a squat-bodied, red-haired rider passed the different sections of Williams' men, going in the same direction. He was a stranger to them, yet his appearance did not seem to be that of any of the four they wanted. Also he passed leisurely, riding with one group a while, answering their questions, then moving up to another, as his horse was fresh and could not be held down to the pace of their worn ones.

He reached the leader before sundown, then went his own way, which, he said, was toward a cut-off that would take him into a lumber camp farther south.

Two days more, and Williams halted on the crest of a ridge which overlooked Cottonwood Camp. It was the end of their trail. Throughout the afternoon the scattered groups rode up and joined the main body, until by nightfall they were prepared to spring their trap.

In the same phantom line that had ridden silently from Virginia City, they passed down to Cottonwood and formed a ring about the half a dozen buildings. The one short street was deserted, they had seen no signs of camp fires in the neighboring hills, and now the only show of life came from the log-house saloon. With the rest of his party remaining in a circle about camp, Williams dismounted alone, paused an instant at the saloon door, then entered.

The long low room was almost as deserted as the street, with only five men lounging at the bar and two at a side table. None of them suited the description of those he wanted.

Then he recognized one at the table as being a freighter from down the valley. Williams walked up to him, and was invited to join in a drink.

"How come you're way up here, Williams?" the freighter asked.

"I'm looking for some one. Have you seen a party riding a buckskin? He probably had three pals with him."

For a time the freighter said nothing, as if considering whether it was best for him to be wise or ignorant. When he did speak it was in a low voice.

"I'm tellin' you this, Jim, but you forget I said it. There were four like that in camp until last night; they dusted out of here some time about dark."

"Which way?"

"Travelin' south."

Williams' hands lay tense upon the table. Here was the end of the trail—but what he had come for was gone. The men had been warned; he knew it. But how? He walked to the door and called into the dark, and presently his men were crowding into the room. While they warmed themselves at the bar he passed among the different groups with a single question.

"Where did that red-headed fellow say he was going?"

"Aimin' for the Notch," said one man.

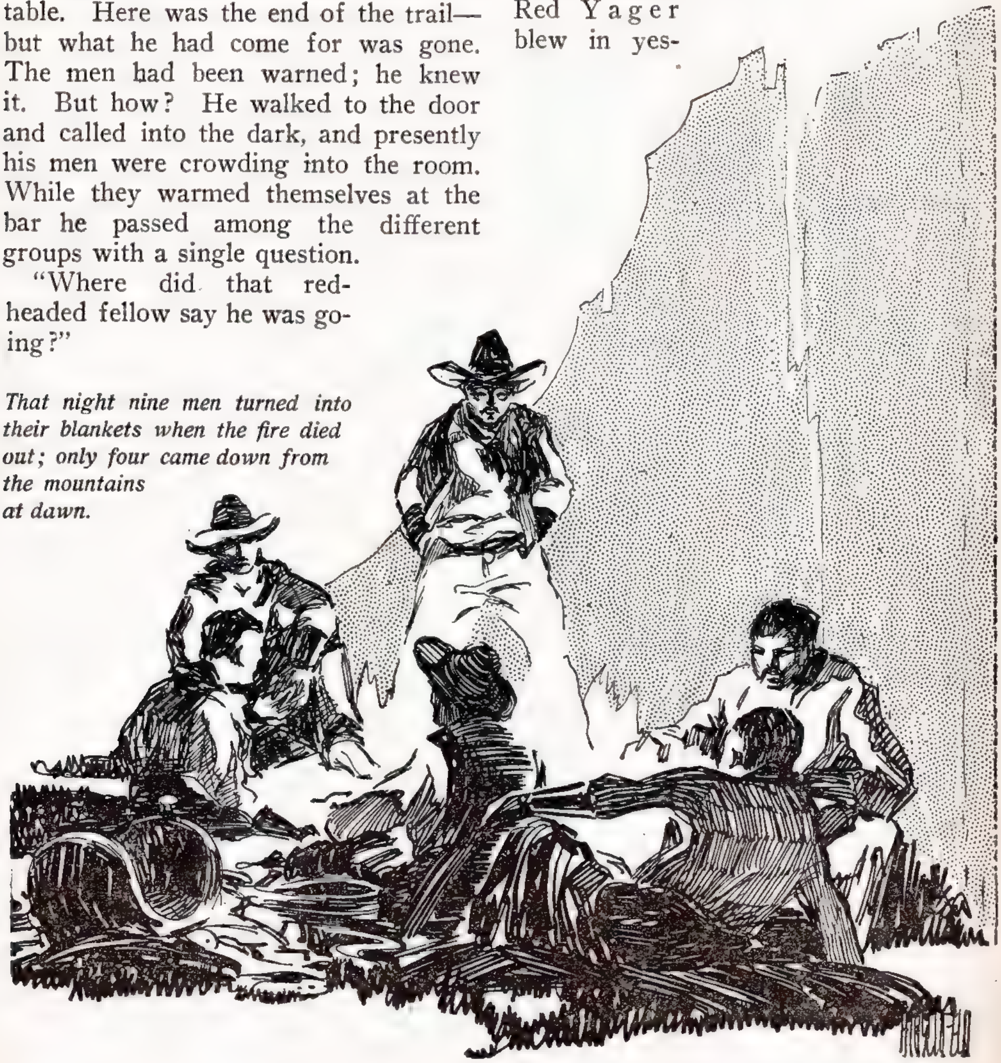
"Told us he was ridin' to Bannack!" exclaimed another.

"And he told me," Williams offered, "that he was due over the fork in a lumber camp."

Now it was plain enough. The fellow had lied to all of them and that fact told its own story. He was the one who had warned the other four.

Going back to the freighter, Williams asked, "Did any one else come in here lately?"

"Yes. A hand from Dempsey's ranch named Red Yager blew in yes-



That night nine men turned into their blankets when the fire died out; only four came down from the mountains at dawn.

terday, but didn't hang around so very long."

"Which way did he go out?"

"Up the trail to Rattlesnake, the last I saw of him." He stepped to the door to indicate the direction.

"Thanks," said Williams, and paid for this news with a round of drinks.

He realized his company could go no farther. The men were dead tired, and their mounts worn from the struggle this far on short feed. As for himself, his hunt was never ended. His persistence had long ago given him the name "Bulldog" Williams. He'd hang on.

Presently he called the group outside and told his plans.

"I'm going after Red Yager. If he warned the four ahead of us he knows their names and a lot about them. We want him. You turn back to Dempsey's ranch, that's the first place where you can get horse feed and grub for yourselves. Stay there a week, and if I'm not in by that time just go on home."

Some offered to go with him, but he knew best. He had played a lone hand before.

Within an hour he was mounted on a fresh horse and headed up the Rattlesnake Trail. His plan was to push on without a stop, as he hoped to cut down the lead that Red Yager had over him, and perhaps take his prisoner before he entered the settlement. Things would be easier that way—just the two of them arguing it out together.

It was toward evening two days later, when, after fighting his way upward through increasing snowdrifts, yet with the tracks of another rider becoming more distinct every mile, he came abruptly onto the rise of a spur and saw the thin blue smoke of a camp fire not half a mile ahead.

No sight could have been more welcome. That gentle ribbon, floating up from a cañon of green pine to curl itself into the mist of low-hanging clouds, meant rest and a good night's sleep—with his man tied fast.

With no thought of any other possibility, he tied his horse, and crept on until he saw the camper was alone and was in fact Red Yager. Then covering him, he uttered the simple Vigilante formula in a voice that was pitched in conversational tone.

"Red Yager, we want you."

That night, true to his plan, he slept soundly beside the camp fire, with Yager bound to a log opposite him.

In the morning when he took up the return trail, he did not strike directly back to Cottonwood, but climbed over a spur of the mountain range and dropped into a valley leading south. A lifetime spent in Indian wars and in tracking men in the wilderness had given him an almost uncanny instinct with which to foretell the movements of his prey.

If the four had gone in this direction, he now argued, there was a chance of cutting across their path somewhere over the ridge. No doubt they would not travel fast and were but looking for another hiding place near by.

A day and a half passed uneventfully. He had swung far to the south, and now in the lower foothills he was looking forward to his arrival at Dempsey's ranch. Ten hours ride would do it.

There was some satisfaction in securing Red Yager, but his main object was still unaccomplished. The four men, Magruder's murderers, were free; he did not even know their names and was certain that Yager would not tell. So even this much seemed far from a Vigilante victory.

Noon of the second day found him halted for cold grub and rest. There had been no tracks of other riders on the trail, and this led him to believe that he was either coming down ahead of the four, or that they had taken to another part of the range.

His midday camp was on a knoll that overlooked a broad cañon mouth covered with only short brush and bare patches of rock. He could see well in all directions. But so could others see him.

The first warning of this was a shot which spattered in the dust near his feet. Leaping up, he pushed Yager in front of his own body, drew his gun and saw a puff of smoke drift from a coulee some distance down the cañon floor. In a moment the fire was repeated, this time from a different angle. There were two more shots, and Williams, glancing from smoke to smoke, knew he faced his four men.

For the time being his position seemed safe enough. Surely they could do no more than graze him as long as he stood behind Red Yager. They'd not shoot one of their own men. At once he saw their only chance would be to get him in their cross-fire, yet he could prevent that if they tried to leave the coulee. Its bank protected them now, but once out of it they would be fully within his range.

So he waited, reluctant to waste his scant supply of shells on blind shots.

The first bullets fired upon him had seemed purposely wide of the mark. Suddenly the aim shifted. A slug cut through Red's shirt sleeve. Another passed close to his leg.

"Hey!" he yelled.

Williams grinned. Yet that grin died abruptly as he saw the full intention of the killers before him. They were after his life—and would take Red's, too, if necessary! They were shooting now with deadly aim.

Dragging Yager, he fell behind a boulder as a volley of lead tore at the spot where they had stood.

Yager turned with a bellow of rage. "Williams, give me my gun! I'll show those skunks! Stand behind me, plug me if I turn an inch toward you, but let me talk back to that bunch."

There was no treachery in Yager's voice. Williams handed him a gun. "Go easy on shells," was all he said. "We're short."

He stood back of Yager, and together they returned a fire that came steadily from the coulee bottom, though they shot only when a good target was presented.

When one head showed over the bank, Williams claimed it with, "That's mine."

The next brought Yager's grim, "Let me have this!"

Still, their six-shooters were at a disadvantage against the longer range of rifles, and even with careful work, their shells vanished without seeming to bring much harm to the four below.

"This is the last round," Williams announced at last, handing Yager a supply.

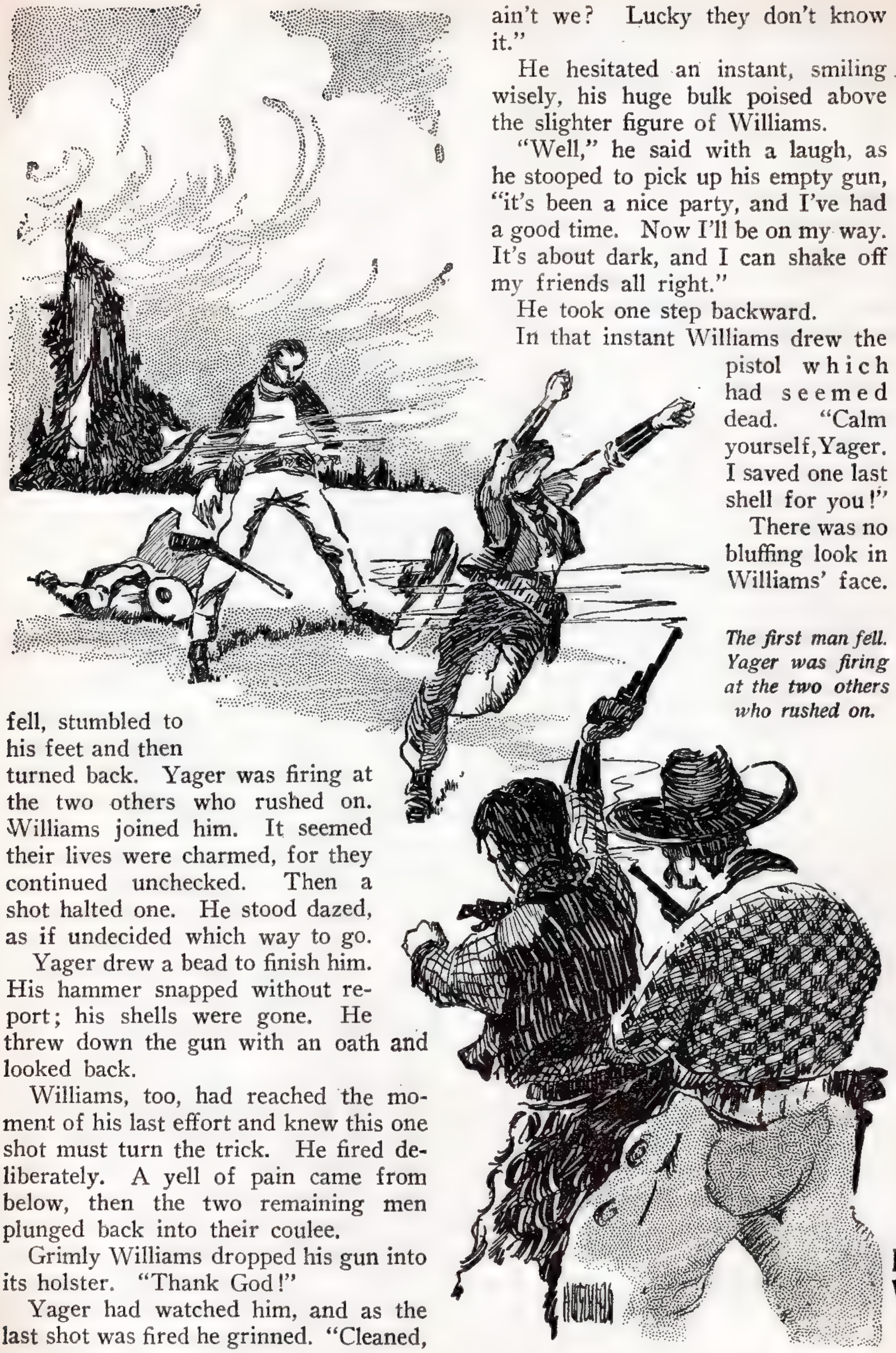
When he filled his own gun with six, there were no more in his belt.

It was now past mid-afternoon. They had successfully held off a rush attack, yet Williams knew it would come. Even as he spoke to Yager about this, he saw three separate flags of dust rise from different parts of the coulee. The men were climbing its bank, three of them —that meant one was laid out. Soon he saw the crowns of their hats reach a level with the cañon floor.

"Get ready," he said, "I think they're coming. I'll have to keep you in front of me in case you change your mind. Save your shells."

Yager was not going to change his mind, for the first shot fired as the three men left their coulee in a rush across the short stretch of open ground, was aimed to bore through him and reach Williams. Their goal was a pile of boulders close to the base of the hump and large enough to cover them if they reached it.

Williams saw the point and told Yager. Then, with the three running for the rocks and well within pistol range, he opened up. His first man



The first man fell. Yager was firing at the two others who rushed on.

**FAR
WEST
4**

fell, stumbled to his feet and then turned back. Yager was firing at the two others who rushed on. Williams joined him. It seemed their lives were charmed, for they continued unchecked. Then a shot halted one. He stood dazed, as if undecided which way to go.

Yager drew a bead to finish him. His hammer snapped without report; his shells were gone. He threw down the gun with an oath and looked back.

Williams, too, had reached the moment of his last effort and knew this one shot must turn the trick. He fired deliberately. A yell of pain came from below, then the two remaining men plunged back into their coulee.

Grimly Williams dropped his gun into its holster. "Thank God!"

Yager had watched him, and as the last shot was fired he grinned. "Cleaned, ain't we? Lucky they don't know it."

He hesitated an instant, smiling wisely, his huge bulk poised above the slighter figure of Williams.

"Well," he said with a laugh, as he stooped to pick up his empty gun, "it's been a nice party, and I've had a good time. Now I'll be on my way. It's about dark, and I can shake off my friends all right."

He took one step backward.

In that instant Williams drew the pistol which had seemed dead. "Calm yourself, Yager. I saved one last shell for you!"

There was no bluffing look in Williams' face.

Nightfall came swiftly. In the dark two men mounted their horses and vanished from the knoll.

The alloted week was almost ended when Williams brought his prisoner down the valley to Dempsey's ranch. There he found that his men had done some good work on their own account, having forced a confession out of a man named Brown, who worked on the place as cook and house boss. He had told them that Red Yager was the one who did the killing in Virginia City, and also that he carried a message of warning to the Magruder murderers.

One thing he would not tell. No threat nor promise could force him to name the man who had sent the letter out of Virginia City on the day that the Vigilantes departed. He seemed held speechless by a fear of some man's vengeance.

When Williams learned of this confession and confronted Yager with it, Red in turn implicated Brown. So with evidence gathered firsthand this way, the Vigilantes at once held their trial. It was done in half an hour, and leaving a guard over the two men, Williams called his party to take a vote.

There was a bridge across a small stream just beyond the Dempsey ranch house, and in the center of it he gathered the group.

"Now boys," he said, "you've heard all about this matter, and I want you to act according to your consciences. All those in favor of hanging these men step to the right side of this bridge, and those who are in favor of letting them go, step to the left."

They marched in a body to the right.

"Well then," he continued, "some of you bring a couple of ropes."

Upon returning to tell Yager of his fate, Williams began an argument that had swiftly formed in his mind.

"Red, you're going to die directly, no matter what else happens. You see we mean business. Your sort has got to go, and it might favor your chances even with the devil if you helped us. Those friends of yours tried to kill you, didn't they? Then they aren't friends.

"Red, I want you to give me a list of the whole gang."

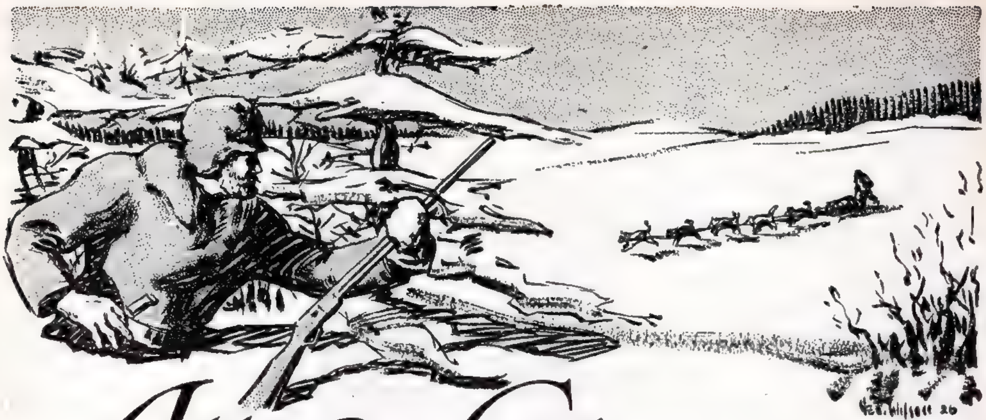
Yager considered it. "I guess you're right," he admitted solemnly. "Montana's too good a country for those skunks. Give me a pencil, Williams. I can do that much anyway with my life."

In his own handwriting he began:

Henry Plummer, chief.
Bill Bunton, second in command and stool pigeon.
Cyrus Skinner, road agent, fence, and spy.
Doc Howard, roadster and killer.
Jem Romaine, killer.

And so on through a list of thirty. It was all the Vigilantes needed; it was their death list, and beginning with the two there at Dempsey's ranch, they settled with the men it named.

Clem Yore's *latest and best:*
Freckles of the Bridle Bit
in the February issue



All for Christmas

By Howard E. Morgan

Alone, on a trackless, snow-covered waste, he fought his desperate battle.

IT was the last of Carson's bacon. His eyes focused on the greasy frying pan with a hungry, wistful expression, and he mouthed the last morsel of salt rind with infinite relish. He eyed longingly a single biscuit frozen solidly to a tin plate within arm's length of the little fire, prodded it tentatively with a thin forefinger, then turned away with a sigh.

For the hundredth time he weighed a small sack of flour on his palm.

"I'm good for ten days, easy, mebbe two weeks."

He spat doubtfully and, as it struck the snow, the saliva froze with a crackling hiss, like water on a hot stove. He shrugged his shoulders; the temperature was more than fifty below. This was an infallible sign.

Again he turned to moody contemplation of the fire, and the greasy pan. The glowing coals, fanned by icy blasts, cast harsh shadows across the bearded face, and unkempt hair, which lay in short, uneven ridges, indicating that it had last been cut with a knife.

He was a big man, but loose-jointed, angular, and thin to the point of emaciation. Long, apelike arms seemed a part of his wide, sloping shoulders. His mighty hands, gnarled and knotted, appeared out of harmony with his haggard body. His eyes, bloodshot, beastlike, set close together beneath heavy black brows, peered furtively from black-rimmed sockets. His cheeks were hollow, and the skin seemed stretched to the point of bursting over the high cheek bones. The thin, straight lips accurately outlined the irregular teeth beneath. In the deep-set eyes, there was a plaintive, troubled look, embodying the haunting fear of some dread, intangible thing; desperation, anxiety, doubt were there. Not that there really was any doubt. It would soon be over. For two weeks he had fought it off with quiet, persistent stubbornness, but the subtle premonition tugging at his heart remained and seemingly thrived upon his puny resistance. Each day, anxious foreboding closer approached awful certainty. Carson, the bum, was nearing the end! Half a sack of flour, a possible week's rations. Ten days, two weeks? He had voiced an optimism that he by no means felt. Thirty biscuits, six biscuits a day, five days, seven days at the most. It really was very simple.

He pictured them finding his body—if the wolves didn't get it first—black and bloated with the scurvy. Would they bother even to dig a hole in the snow? Some old sour dough, who had known the Jim Carson of other days, might undertake it for memory's sake, but, at best, it was a question. Carson the bum, what better did he deserve? A burning resentment against the world in general brought a tinge of color to his leaden cheeks, and his dormant spirit suddenly flamed into active being; the waning desire to live, fanned by the breath of his bitter malice, glowed. Gradually the thin lips lost their droop, the chin was thrust forward and the heart that had carried Carson, the derelict, through a quarter century of hell and sordidness with a spirit warped but unbroken, defied death. With pitiful pugnaciousness, that spirit denied the necessity of things material, and firmly held to what shred of hope there was in this dire situation. There must be a way out. Never before had he acknowledged defeat.

For long he sat brooding by the dying flames. Slowly the worry and foreboding left his eyes, to be replaced by a fixed resolve. Out of the chaos he had found a way. But it was not a pretty way. The haggard face became harsh and brutish, and the thin lips were stretched tightly in a firm straight line.

With resolve came immediate action. He stood erect with difficulty and reached for the rifle. With arm outstretched he paused and started counting painstakingly on the fingers of the outstretched hand. It must be Christmas week. Yes, three days to Christmas. Two nights, then Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve! He shuddered, forgot the rifle and sank shivering by the fire. Twenty-five years! Twenty-five years ago! The white lips trembled with wordless mumblings, and the gaunt body shook as with the ague. Twenty-five years! If only he could forget. But no, he could never forget. How clearly he recalled every detail. Christmas Eve, twenty-five years ago: the bitter twenty-hour run with the Christmas mail; two hundred miles in five days. Impossible? Ah, but no finer dog runner than Jim Carson drew breath between Seattle and the arctic circle. And why? Why had he stopped at Keppler's cabin, Keppler whom he knew to be a skunk? Five miles only it had been to Kluchuk, and he with the finest dog team in Alaska, and three hundred pounds of Christmas mail. He had been ahead of schedule, as usual; yes, that had been the reason he had stopped. Jim Carson always had been ahead of schedule. Never had the glad-eyed women and the laughing children been disappointed when Jim Carson carried the mail. Smiling faces! How he missed them. But that night, in Keppler's cabin, the burning liquor; one drink led to others, many others; the fateful drowsiness, the blow on the head. Then the awakening, Christmas morning, to find the marshal standing over him.

They had accused him of stealing the Christmas mail. Keppler had done it, of course, but there was no proof. Fifteen years the judge had said. And Carson had served the full term. Those fifteen years had broken him, body and soul. He had worked but little since. As Carson, the bum, he was known throughout the great northland. Men mouthed his name with a sneer. And it wasn't right. He had not stolen.

The fire was low, and Carson roused,

shivering, to find the sun, pale and lusterless, rising to its daily hopeless battle with the terrible cold. He noted dispassionately that his ankles had swollen during the night; soon the scurvy would reach his knees. But what mattered it now? Soon, very soon, he would have food, life, a sled, and dogs to take him to the land of sunshine, vegetables for his scurvy, food and drink for his wasted body, money to spend. He had decided to rob the next sled passing over the Dunkirk trail.

He made biscuits and ate them slowly, chewing each bit with infinite relish. He used half of the remaining coffee and drank many pannikins of the scalding black liquid.

Somewhat refreshed, he started laboriously to strike camp. But every move was agony, and at last, when the duffle was loaded on the cumbersome sled, and he set his raw shoulders to the rope, the cumulated pain forced tears, unbidden, to his eyes. The tiny drops froze on his lashes; he could not brush them away.

Within the first mile he stopped often and leaned dizzily against a tree; each time the shooting pains in his legs started the spark of life in his drooping body. By noon he had covered four miles, and the open trail lay before him, stretching to the south, twenty miles to Dunkirk, to the north, forty miles to Pont Nuef. He pitched his tent, carefully screened from the trail by low-flung branches of a stunted spruce. Then he built a roaring fire and carefully cleaned his gun. With dusk he made more biscuits and collected dry wood, then curled close to the fire and tried to sleep. He thrust his right hand beneath the tattered Mackinaw and held it close against his warm body. This good hand must be protected at all costs. His life, and the lives of others, depended on it.

He could not sleep. The swelling had moved on to his knees and the throbbing pain was doubled. His nerves were on edge. His morbid imagination conjured up weird, fantastic visions that took form in the curling smoke wreaths and vanished mockingly into the checkered gloom. Horrible, ghastly things were these visions, grimacing wraiths of dead men who chattered at him with fleshless jaws and mocked him with obscene gestures. Carson had never before killed a man. It was—but no! It was not murder! Not murder! Justice! A debt, long past due. The world owed it to him. One more glimpse of life, one more brief taste of happiness, sunshine, warmth, food. Yes, he would do it. The first sled bound for the south. It should be his.

With a start he sat erect, the realization coming upon him suddenly that he was raving, on the verge of madness.

All through the night the bent body crouched before the fire, the red-rimmed, bulging eyes staring fixedly into the flames, the bloodless lips moving fitfully in senseless babble.

With dawn he smothered the fire and crouched behind the spruce screen, the black rifle held rigidly before him. Within the hour he was chilled to the bone. But he sat on and on, unmindful of the numbing cold, his eyes fixed with a terrible intensity on the open trail.

During the morning a group of Indians passed, filthy, wretched creatures, with a single sled half filled with mangy furs. Near noon a detachment of police with three beautiful dog teams hurried by. Carson lay low until long after they had disappeared in the distance.

During the afternoon and all of the next day no living thing appeared. Fate was against him. His flour was gone. He was very weak; alternately he sobbed quietly at his post, and cursed impotently at the illimitable reaches of glistening whiteness—the trail that held no sign of life. Oft-recurring spells of dizziness, accompanied by retching nausea swept over him, each attack more violent than the one before. Between these spells, a pleasant drowsiness fought for possession of his senses. But, despite its fair promises he knew this cloying lethargy for what it was. Beneath the magic cloak of promised dreams, lurked death, everlasting abysmal darkness. He fought it off with all his strength. Death was too pleasant a thing to be altogether honest in its promises. All good things came hard.

It was mid-afternoon of the third day when it happened.

The day before Christmas! Even in his half-delirium, his murderous resolve, and its attendant gruesome visions, automatically gave place to gentler thoughts. There came fairer visions of other days, little hands groping toward bulky Christmas packages, red-cheeked women, happy children. To-morrow would be Christmas day, and even in this cursed northland, it was a day of good cheer and happiness, a day of smiling faces.

Then there was a wavering speck upon the northern horizon, a tenuous gray blur, that gained distinctness as it approached. It was a dog team. He stared incredulously at first, then, with full realization, strove desperately to collect his arrant thoughts, to concentrate on the coming ordeal.

In his hurry and extreme weakness, he fell among the outflung branches of the spruce scrub. The rifle became entangled in the sticky boughs. He scrambled frantically to free it, and as he did so, he broke through the crust and sank waist deep in the soft snow. In the ensuing struggle he lost a mitten, the right one, and before he could recover it, the hand was useless, numbed with the quick cold. He shifted the rifle awkwardly and searched for his victim over the sights.

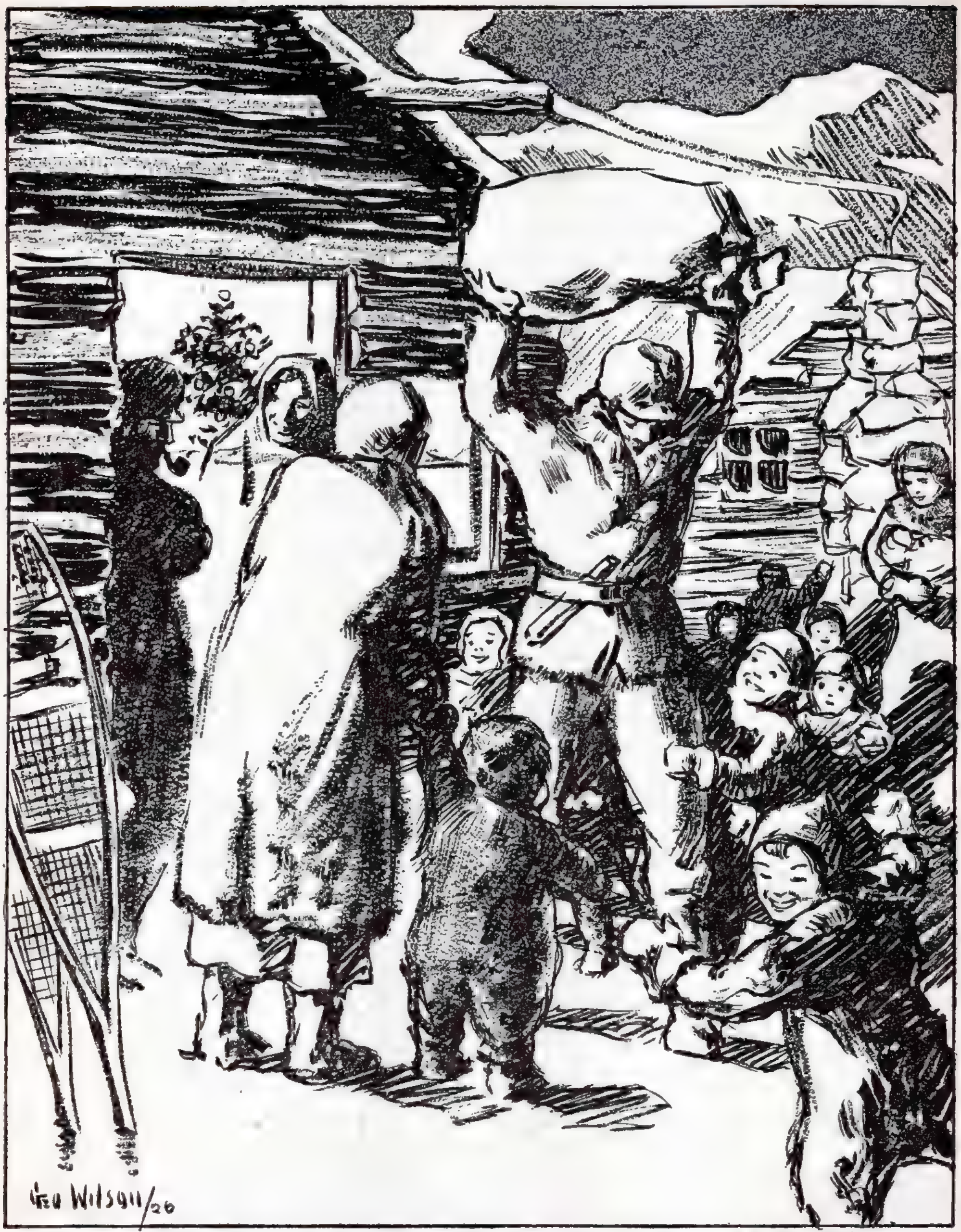
The sled was near now. But something was wrong. The driver staggered and swayed, and, as Carson sought nervously to bring him into focus, he fell headforemost, and did not get up. The sled came to a stop. Mystified, Carson stepped into the open and approached cautiously, every nerve atingle, the rifle held unsteadily before him.

A single glance told the story; the gaunt, half-starved huskies, the sled, battered and broken, the inert body of the man stretched full length on the snow, a mittenless hand frozen to the gee pole. A new driver, and he had missed the overland trail from Pont Nuef; had wandered for days, perhaps, in the intricate swales of Diever's Basin. The man was beyond all need of human assistance. A thin line of congealed blood rimmed the swollen lips. Frosted lungs. Carson breathed a sigh of relief. The nervous uncertainty vanished. He still had the five cartridges in his gun, and the sled was his. He knelt close by and pawed feverishly among the odds and ends. There must be something, a sack of rice, a bit of coffee, a pinch of salt.

He started suddenly to his feet and drew back gasping. A heavy sack marked "Dunkirk." The mail! The Christmas mail! He sank on the sled and buried his head in his hands. The gaunt huskies turned in their traces and observed him with fierce, inquisitive eyes. Christmas mail! The supreme irony of it.

After a bit he recovered his self-possession somewhat and resumed his search for food. A bit of jerked beef he found, scarcely a mouthful, the tip of what had once been a juicy loin. It was still pierced with a strip of rawhide. He gulped it down ravenously and chewed for long on the piece of rawhide.

When he was satisfied that there was no more food he returned to the fire. His thoughts were confused and traveled in an endless circle of nonessentials. The sudden good fortune stunned him.



There came fairer visions of other days, little hands groping toward bulky Christmas packages, red-cheeked women, happy children.

On that sled, in that canvas bag, there was wealth, life, happiness—thousands of dollars in valuable mail, the Christmas offerings of fathers, brothers, and sweethearts to the loved ones in the South. Food? He might kill one of the dogs. This would suffice until he reached the hills. He still had the five cartridges. Ill fortune could not forever follow him. He might chance upon a moose yard in the swamps. And failing that, there were always the dogs, tough, wiry beasts, true, but still food, and two of them could haul the sled, by easy stages. Then, in the spring, he would journey to the South, far, far to the South, California perhaps. None would suspect him, Carson the bum. He would dispose of his spoils, gradually, so as not to attract attention, and he would live quietly in a little house overlooking the sea where there would always be sunshine, and three times a day he would have steak, huge, thick, juicy steaks and plenty to drink, dust-covered bottles in a row, with vari-colored labels; and perhaps a wife, children with curly hair, round cheeked, smiling——

Cold perspiration started out on his forehead, and he abruptly knew that he had been fighting very hard to realize this Utopia against an impalpable but persistent thing that tugged at his heart, clamored insistently to be heard, and finally assumed definite shape and took possession of his wavering resolve. He could no longer evade the issue. It was the Christmas mail upon which he based his vision of happiness. Should he then again bring sadness to his smiling faces, build his doubtful happiness on their broken hearts? Doubtful happiness indeed; the police would find him out, and then, a replica of that ghastly nightmare, which had stolen away his soul, crushed his body. But no! He knew this northland; they would not find him. Money, food, sunshine, all in that canvas bag; but, again came the intangible vision that despite all warmed his empty heart—tiny hands groping upward toward the light; smiling faces. He cursed impotently. His heart throbbed, pounding hollowly against his ribs. With much painful effort he arose and returned to the sled. At sight of the empty knapsack he again turned to thoughts of food and strove desperately to convince his livening conscience that after all it was the better way, that the first vision was the most desirable: meat, thick, juicy steak. His starving body cried out for it. But his actions belied his studied thoughts. He scraped a shallow hole with his snowshoe and buried the dead man; next he saw to the dogs, adjusted the harness, then tightened the babiche thongs securing the mail bag.

He became excited, trembled in every limb. His pain-racked eyes gleamed queerly. A real joy filled his wasted body with an unnatural strength; a sense of self-assurance came, a confidence born of long familiarity, engendered by contact with the dogs, the sled, the canvas bag, all familiar tools of other days. Jim Carson always was on time. There were still several hours of daylight. The Christmas mail would reach Dunkirk, Christmas morning. Jim Carson would bring it in. His original vision faded, and he fed his hungry heart upon the other: Jim Carson, the Jim Carson of old, mushing down the main street of Dunkirk with the mail, the group of scurrying women and children gathering eagerly about, the triumphant entry into the store, the red-hot Yukon stove, a glass of steaming grog, and—smiling faces all about.

It took him an hour to collect his few belongings and tie them on the sled. He was very weak and dizzy and staggered aimlessly about in narrow half circles. His abused heart pounded wildly, and a red film blurred his eyes.

Dense black clouds stealthily filled the sky. A vast, portentious stillness ushered in the early dusk and oppressed him with a definite hint of menace. He anxiously inspected the darkening horizon. A vagrant snowflake lazily brushed his cheek, followed close by a pursuing puff of wind, and more snow.

With infinite patience he roused the weary, footsore dogs and skillfully steered them onto the southbound trail. The crust held firm, and he crouched on the sled, thankful that he was not called upon to break the trail. But it would not last. Already it was snowing harder, infinitesimal ice pellets were driven by fitful winds. Soon the crust would be covered by hard, shifting snow which would strain the endurance of the weakened dogs to the utmost. But he could and would break trail if necessary; Jim Carson had never been known to mistreat his dogs. Swirling sheets of snowdust continually enveloped him and beat the leaden cheeks into sudden false color; he clung weakly to the sled, and each abrupt lurch sent spasms of pain shooting through his bloated body. Still was he imbued with a strange elation that held above the racking pain and the clinging faintness. Once more he was carrying the mail, the Christmas mail. Jim Carson was paying his debt, making good to his smiling faces.

With voice and whip he spurred on the lagging dogs. Half the distance must be covered by nightfall, before the snow deepened and rendered the going difficult.

He took advantage of many short cuts; Jim Carson knew this north country, none better. At the base of a ridge he turned sharply from the trail and struck out at right angles across a trackless open space. A vast, wind-swept stretch of utter bleakness spread out before him, a gray-white wilderness with dimmed borders. But he held his course, straight as the crow flies, for the opposite lake shore, taking full advantage of the blizzard at his back. For a time the dogs slipped and slid on the snow-blurred mirror, then the glare ice gradually gave way to a cementlike roughness which made the going more certain. The gray horizon grew momentarily darker. The sled swung onto the light snow on the lake shore. Wind-harried pines on the forest edge one by one assumed definite shape.

At the base of a knoll where the trail led into the soughing blackness of the thicket, Carson rested and pawed the ice from eyes and beard with a frozen mitten. But he dared not stop for long. The quiet cold beat down his waning resistance, slowly but confidently sought to gain possession of his feeble body. He roused himself with difficulty and pushed on into the forest.

Among the thick, long-trunked hemlocks, the blustering storm was a futile thing. Closely interwoven treetops bandied the fitful, snow-laden winds about, accepted some small portion of their burden and filtered it gently to the ground. He was oppressed by the almost palpable stillness; it palled upon him, seemed to drag him down. There was an unpleasant whirring in his ears. He was dimly aware that the sled was moving slowly, very slowly. The tired dogs were giving out. Desperately he strove to raise the whip, to shout. A pleasant drowsiness seized upon him. He fell forward, but, with the last fluttering instinct of self-preservation, caught the mail bag and gripped it tightly. The familiar touch found a responsive chord in his numbed body. He struggled to his knees, panic-stricken at his near collapse, frantic at the delay, and leaned his weight against the sled, calling hoarsely to the dogs. The frozen runners finally gave way, and the sled lurched forward. For a time he ran behind, then his swollen legs abruptly refused his weight, and he sprawled on his face in the snow. But he clung desperately, and on a sharp down grade, pulled his throbbing body back onto the sled. For a long time he lay very still, breathing hard in short, painful gasps, his whole body palpitating from the racking strain.

The sting of the blizzard revived him somewhat, and he knew that the forest was behind, that near at hand lay the river, Thunder River, a rushing, roaring, mountain torrent. Only in spots was this steep-banked, swift-moving stream frozen solid, even in the dead of winter. But he was halfway to Dunkirk. Five miles more to the ferry, Little Ferry, a strip of quiet water that would be frozen and would support the sled. Five miles more. He must not, dare not, miss the ferry.

He swung his arms for warmth, but the sluggish blood did not respond. The unmittened hand, long since frozen, flopped about grotesquely, and he marveled vaguely at its unnatural whiteness. The blissful drowsiness came upon him again. He fought it off doggedly, desperately, but despite all, it insinuated itself into the innermost fibers of his being and bit by bit coaxed his weakening will power into submission. With a last mighty effort he bound his wrists with the whip lash to a sturdy pole set in the framework of the sled. This held his body partially erect, and each sudden dip of the sled found response in a corresponding lurch of his body. The accompanying pain brought involuntary moans to the frozen lips, but still he drowsed, fitfully. Brief flashes of startling lucidity merged quickly into horrible nightmares; he was aware of continued motion, rising, falling, swaying, of stinging snow twisting itself down out of the darkness, of rushing water, of——

The sled dipped suddenly, careened crazily to one side, then shot out upon glare ice, thrusting the reluctant, yelping dogs before. The ferry. But no. There came the pound of rushing water, a sharp ominous crackling; without warning the thin ice gave way, and the lead dog, struggling wildly, disappeared in a shower of icy spray. Bewildered and scared, Carson tore frantically at the thongs binding his wrists and fumbled madly at the canvas bag. The helpless beasts, entangled in the harness, battled unavailingly, and one by one disappeared. The sled drew nearer and nearer to the black, foamy abyss; with a last supreme effort Carson pulled free, and, hugging the precious sack tightly in his arms, rolled aside, just as the sled up-ended and dove under the ice.

Lying full length on the treacherous ice, moving forward inch by inch, pushing the sack before him, he was two hours in reaching the bank. But Carson did not know this. He was conscious only of the agonized throbbing of his heart. The inchoate urge that forced his pain-racked body onward, developed into purely mechanical motion. He knew merely that he must go on. Far, far away, rising and falling, rolling, and tossing, in black, billowing mists, his smiling faces nodded and beckoned. In the brief lucid intervals he tried to reason it all out, but each time his mind wandered and branched off into weird fantasies. There was naught of the present in these mental vagaries. He lived his life over again; accurately and consecutively the sordid details passed in review. Reckless, carefree youth, when he was untaught, unloved; famous drinking bouts at Dawson; snowbound Alaskan trails; dogs, the government mail; jail, suffering, torture, and then, Carson, the pariah —days, months, years, long years of cold, hunger, and abuse. Still he moved on. His body seemed strangely detached, no longer a part of him. The pain was gone.

He reached the top of the bank, somehow, still clasping the sack. He faced the east, always the east—Dunkirk. He did not know how far, but Jim Carson would be in with the mail, as usual. The storm had ceased, suddenly, as it had come. It was frightfully cold. He staggered on, rising, falling, walking, crawling. He had no conception of time. A pale strip of pink appeared in the east. White, gauzelike clouds hurried across the sky. He topped a knoll and clambered slowly erect, bracing his body against a sapling. A vast, treeless basin spread out below him. And, in the half light, he saw a cabin—many cabins, scattered about the sides, and a cluster of cabins in the center. A light shone dimly from a window, a smoke ribbon lifted lazily, advertising an early riser. He stared and rubbed his mist-blurred eyes unbelievingly. Dunkirk! He had then passed the ford in the night. Below him, not half a mile away, was Dunkirk. And here was Jim Carson, with the mail, Christmas morning, ahead of schedule as usual. It was still too early. His smiling faces were not yet up,

With his goal in sight, the struggle went out of him. That inchoate, implacable thing which had urged him on through the long night, drew away, and a great peace settled upon him; a sweet desire for sleep, balmy with promises of easement and rest. After all what did it matter? The mail, even the Christmas mail—baubles, senseless letters. For himself, temporary warmth and food, a flitting taste of happiness, then, back to the old life—days, months, an eternity filled with cold, hunger and despair. Here in the snow he was happy, warm, and contented. He had never known that death was so easy. For it was death. And he was not afraid. He was even angry that he had struggled and fought against it through so many weary years. Every torture he had experienced had been a torture of life. Death was kind. Life it was that was cruel. But no—no—not now —not yet. Christmas morning, all must be smiles and happiness. Once had he brought sadness to the smiling faces, but not again. No, no, not again.

Frantically he scrambled to his feet and stood erect, swaying gently like a gruesome pendulum. The sun was peeping over the snow-capped mountains. Many smoke wreaths now curled upward from many cabins. An intangible air of bustle and expectancy hung over the white-roofed town. Tiny, furclad figures scurried here and there. Several of them huddled together in the center of the street. They were watching for the mail!

Bracing his sagging body, Carson hauled the sack to his shoulder and made his way slowly down the slope. A chorus of shrill calls came faintly to his ears. They had discovered him. Buoyed up to a final effort by a strange elation that flooded his hungry heart and coursed warmly through his sluggish veins, he straightened his bent body, and lengthened his dragging step.

They met him at the bottom of the slope and circled about, doubtfully at first, frightened at his haggard appearance. But although the frozen lips gave forth no sound, the mist-dimmed eyes were kind and smiled out at them through the ice-coated whiskers. They watched him closely and smiled in return—round, rosy cheeks, happy, expectant faces. His heart overflowed with gladness. He was paying his debt, making good to his smiling faces. They gathered around, clung to his coat and babbled countless questions. Nearer the village, others joined them; some tiny tots, and women, sweet-faced, happy women. A larger group awaited him.

Photo by Raymond Thompson

It was a land of long trails, and hard trails.

He hurried on. They gathered close about. He raised the sack high above his head, as of old. They laughed and chattered, all talking at once; tiny hands reached upward. Smiling faces, all about, smiling faces. He saw them, and was happy.

A down-dragging weakness came over him suddenly. A sensation of the supreme futility of all earthly things strangely intermingled with a quiet satisfaction. All was well. He was not afraid. He accepted calmly, without protest, the pleasant lethargy that again enveloped his aching body. The smiling faces appeared as through a mist, rose tinted, vibrant with life; shrill voices came to him faintly as from a distance. Then, he was vaguely aware of strong hands that lifted him—carried him. There was a heavenly, all-pervading warmth.

He came awake in Lafe Broderson's store. Men were shaking him by the hand. Slapping him on the back. Hearty voices. Friendly voices. Women chattered. Children prattled. Round, chubby faces. Red-cheeked—smiling. He exchanged merry badinage with them. The women set food before him. He wolfed it down. Sipped steaming grog. Then he nodded over the pot-bellied Yukon stove. Sleep. He contemplated this God-given solace blissfully. Crawled into a bunk. Motherly hands covered him with blankets. Carson grinned up into their happy faces. Jim Carson, the Carson of old. He had paid his debt. Made good to his smiling faces.

* * *

White Waifs Among the Indians

IN the early days of Wyoming's history, hostile Indians, as every one knows, made travel an exceedingly dangerous occupation; and happy was the pioneer family that reached the end of its particular long, long trail without casualties. Perhaps the fate these sturdy souls most dreaded was capture by the redskins; for never was there a race more skilled in the art of torture. But, after all, the red man did not always torture and kill his captives; sometimes he gave them every consideration and made them members of the tribe. This latter method he employed in the cases of Charlie White Man and Mrs. Broken Horn, both of whom are living to-day on the Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming.

Both Charlie White Man and Mrs. Broken Horn were captured during infancy, probably after their respective parents had been slain. Both grew to maturity knowing nothing of the ways of their own people; both married full-blooded Indians and proceeded to rear families of their own.

Strangely enough Mrs. Broken Horn, whose husband was Chief Broken Horn, one of the treaty chiefs of the Arapahoe tribe, objects to being called a white woman and prefers to live the remainder of her life among her adopted people. Although she is now quite advanced in years, there is about this woman an erectness of carriage not common to Indian women of this generation. Her skin is leathery and wrinkled and brown from long exposure to the hot sun, dust, and wind of the plains country, but there is something in her grim-lipped, purposeful face dimly reminiscent of a typical New England spinster.

Charlie White Man, on the contrary, seems rather proud of his white blood, but, like Mrs. Broken Horn, is content to spend the rest of his life with the Indians. He is also a member of the Arapahoe tribe.

The Dog Mama Didn't Like

By

Robert Ormond Case

IT all started, the real big argument, I mean, at the dinner table just before daddy's vacation was to begin. My, but daddy was mad, so mad that he pounded on the table and swore, and mama said to me: "Now run away, Peggy, if daddy's going to act like this, I won't have you listening to vile language."

Well, I didn't run away, because when daddy and mama got into an argument I knew they wouldn't notice, and daddy said:

"I tell you, Clara, it's confounded nonsense. Every once in a while you get an idea into your head, and it sticks like a porous plaster. Now just absorb this, my lady: If Shag stays home there won't be any vacation." And he looked at mama with light in his eyes and said, "Yes, I mean it."

"Don't talk so rough, Bill," said mama in her very sweetest sugar voice. "We've got neighbors in this block, you know." And, then, they argued for a long time about Shag. Of course, I was only five years old then, and I didn't pay much attention except once in a while. That was five years ago, you see, and I was only a little girl; but I knew what they were talking about. And, when daddy shouted at mama, I leaned against her, and she squeezed my hand awful hard while she talked, and I could feel her kind of shaking. They didn't get into an argument except once in a while. Daddy's awful big, and he's got hairy arms.

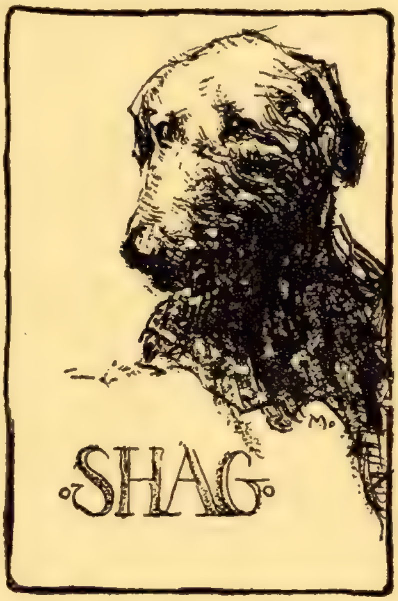
"Ever since we got married, Clara, you've been reforming me. It's the bunk," daddy said and kind of gritted his teeth. "First, it was a drink with the boys. As if a little drink, now and then, wasn't good for a man! Then, my pipe—it was a filthy thing and all the rest of it. So I had to smoke cigars. Then, you raised sweet Ned about poker. I haven't had a friendly game with the boys in years. Now by the jumpin' jiminy"—only daddy didn't say jumping jiminy, and mama raised her chin a little higher—"you start in on Shag. Oh, you can't fool me," daddy said. "That's just preliminary. Next thing you know, you'll want me to get rid of Shag altogether."

"Nothing would please me more," mama said. "If we must have a dog about the house, why don't you get one that Peggy can play with, a nice little dog with silky hair and not a big ungainly brute that must be kept tied up all the time? Shag eats as much as you do. He's an expensive nuisance."

"That's it," said daddy. "Me and Shag, we're both nuisances, huh? Silky hair," he continued. "One of those pink-nosed yapping lap dogs. Every time I come near one, I want to wring its neck. Shag's a real dog," he said. "He's one of the wire-haired breed. And I'll bet right now that Peggy would rather have a big husky up-standing dog like Shag to play with than all the yapping peanut pups in town. Peggy's got some sense," daddy said.

Mama leaned over me and stroked my hair and patted me on the back and said: "Wouldn't you like to have a nice little dog with beautiful silky hair and a pink ribbon? You would now, wouldn't you, Peggy?"

So I said: "Yes, daddy, I want a little dog with slinky hair." Mama laughed and laughed when I said that, and daddy kind of growled way down deep in him and stamped out into the garden.



After daddy left, mama cried, and I cried, but I got over it first. While mama was powdering her nose, I ran out into the garden to see what daddy was doing.

We've got a big garden, and it was awful dark. When I went down the back steps and past the garage I was pretty scared; but I knew daddy was out there somewhere with Shag. So I went out past the holly tree; and the night wind was making creepy noises in the leaves, and the flowers were kind of rustling. I stood real still when I saw daddy and Shag. I knew it must be them; but it was very dark and there wasn't any lights out there but the stars. Daddy had turned Shag loose and was running with him way yonder by the shrubbery. Shag was an awful big dog. He was high as my shoulder; but, of course, I was only five years old then and was just a little girl. Daddy had one hand on Shag's neck; but daddy is so big that he had to kind of lean down and that made his arms seem bigger and longer than usual, and he ran kind of crouching. Just when I was going to call daddy and ask him to wait so I could play with them, too, I saw a red light glowing in the dark on the other side of the bushes. Daddy stopped there and said: "Well, Hank, counting the stars?"

Daddy always calls our next-door neighbor Hank, but his right name is Mr. Hamilton. That's what mama calls him, and she says he's one of daddy's lowbrow friends, and she wishes we would move to a different neighborhood. But daddy says he doesn't care; Hank's a good scout.

"What in the world are you up to, Bill?" said Hank, coming through the bushes, puffing on his cigar. "You are running around in the dark like a wild man."

"Just giving the dog some exercise," said daddy, laughing kind of short, "and working off a grouch. Me and the wife have been having another battle about Shag."

Well, when they began to talk, I thought I would kind of stay and listen because I knew daddy would send me back in the house if he knew I was there. Shag turned his head around to look at me; but daddy's hand was still on his neck so he stood still and his eyes were shining like little moons. Shag's eyes were, I mean.

So daddy told Hank about mama not wanting Shag to go with us on our vacation up into the Roaring River country, and that mama wanted him to get rid of Shag, and Hank said it was a shame. My eyes could see better now in the dark. Daddy was looking down at Shag while he was talking.

"You know, Hank," said daddy, "I'll have to leave him home, because when

Clara makes up her mind, that's all there is to it. So if you'll take care of him, I'll be much obliged. You know, Hank," daddy said, "when we start out to-morrow, our first stop will be at grandma's place. Shag likes it there. There's usually a bunch of stray sheep get into grandma's wheat, and Shag chases them out." And when daddy said grandma's place and sheep, Shag wagged his stumpy tail and gave a kind of growly bark like he does when he's particularly pleased.

"I believe, Hank," said daddy, "that if Shag should happen to get loose to-morrow after we're gone, he would head right for grandma's place to find us."

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Hank, puffing on his cigar.

"The middle of the forenoon, huh?"

"Yeah," said daddy. "That would give him until the next morning to overtake us." And he laughed and said, "Hank, old man, I'll appreciate it."

Then, they laughed and talked for a little bit, and daddy said well he guessed he'd better go in now and tell the wife that she was right, and he was going to leave Shag home. And Hank said, "Yes, but if your wife ever finds it out, my name will be mud." And daddy said, "Leave it to me, and maybe I can help you out when you're in a jack pot. We've got to stick together, don't we, Hank?"

So I ran in the house and pretty soon daddy came in. He was smiling a little bit, and he kind of blinked in the light. Mama was holding her chin up and looked at him hard, and she said:

"Well?"

"You were right," said daddy. "As usual. We'll leave Shag home." So mama smiled and put her arms around him, and they hugged each other. And mama said, "You know, dear, I didn't really want to appear mean about it." And daddy said, "That's all right, let's get busy now and get the rest of our things packed, so we can start bright and early in the morning."

When we were ready to start the next morning, and daddy was cranking the car, mama said, "Why don't you get a new battery? Are you going to have to crank the car and swear all the time we're gone?"

"I didn't figure it was much use getting a new battery," said daddy. "There's a friend of Hank's up at Big Bend who has a garage. If he'll do the right thing and allow me enough, I'll trade this old wreck in on a new car."

"Will you really?" said mama. "Bill, you're a darling. I've been ashamed to ride in this old rattle-trap for a long time."

"It's a good old boat," said daddy. "I've run it fifty thousand miles. That's twice as far as around the world," said daddy, tickling me under the chin.

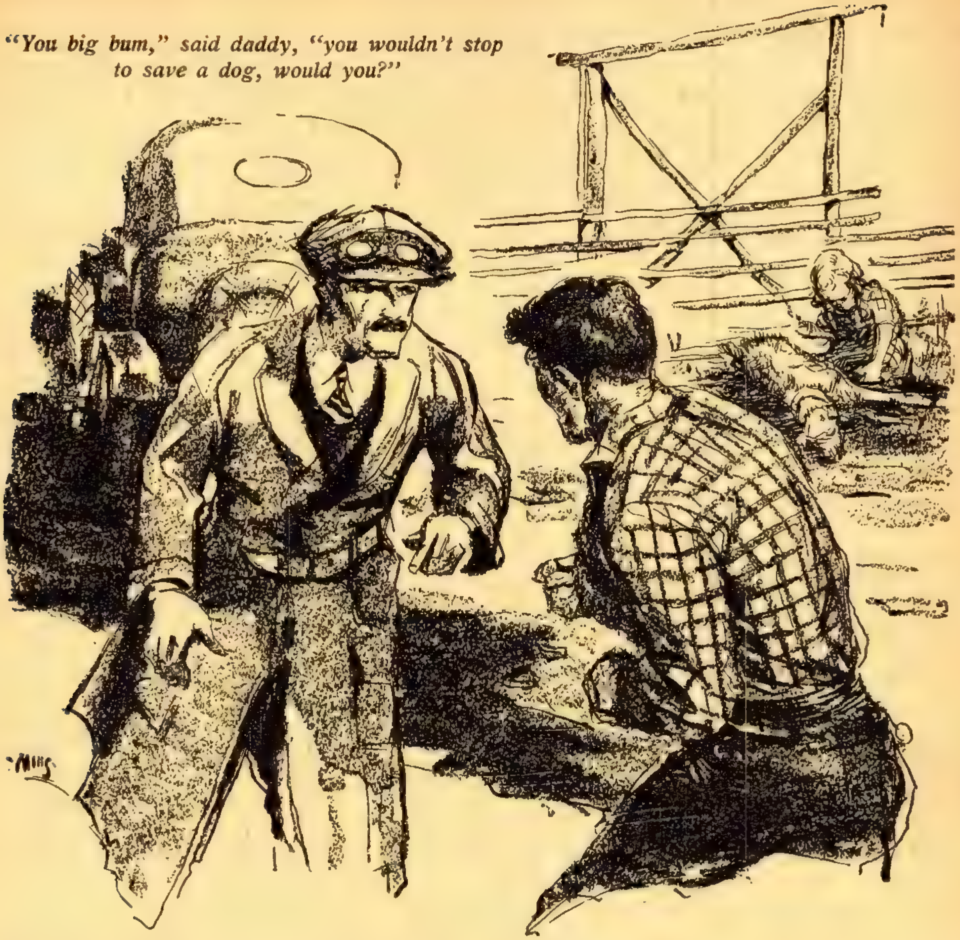
"Oh, my!" I said.

Daddy and mama and me were all in the front seat, and in the back was camping equipment and blankets, and a lot of stuff, and daddy's fishing rods. When we started out, Shag jumped up and down and barked and whined, but he was chained to his house in the shrubs. Daddy shouted at him and told him to shut up, and Shag kind of hung his head and didn't wag his tail any more. He was a big shaggy dog, shaggy all over, even his face; and his eyes were like big shiny black beads. I heard daddy tell Hank once that Shag was a thoroughbred mongrel, and that he was awful strong and weighed fifty pounds, fifty-five after he had eaten his dinner.

"Hank will take care of him," daddy told mama as we backed out of the driveway, and he kind of chuckled.

Well, we traveled an awful long ways that day; and we camped by a creek that ran under a bridge under the highway; and we ate a lunch with chicken salad that mama had put up before we left. In the afternoon, I slept in the back

"You big bum," said daddy, "you wouldn't stop to save a dog, would you?"



seat while daddy drove, and pretty soon after that we stopped all of a sudden and daddy said, "Well, here we are at grandma's place."

My, I was glad to be at grandma's place because she always has some doughnuts! Of course, I was only a little girl then; but mama let me eat a whole doughnut, and then I went out to look at the pigs; and, after that, grandma let me feed the chickens. After supper, mama said, "Well, it's time for little girls to be in bed;" but daddy said, "Oh, let the kid run around a little first. It isn't often she gets out into the country;" and he said to me: "Come on, Peggy, we'll walk down through the orchard."

"All right, then," mama said, "but don't keep her up long!"

So we walked down through the orchard where the apples were almost ready to pick, and there was some hay. My, it smelled nice, and it was cool down there; and daddy said "I'll go down to the gate and watch the cars whiz by." So he walked on ahead, and I played in the hay for a while and it got a little darker. And pretty soon mama called from the house: "Bill, oh Bill, bring that child home so that I can put her to bed." And daddy said, "In a minute."

Daddy was leaning over the gate by the lilac bushes, smoking. I ran down and took hold of his hand, and he opened the gate, and we went out to the edge of the highway. There were lots of cars passing, but daddy didn't look at them. He stood with his hand over his eyes and looked down the highway. We could see the road for a long long ways toward the sunset, like a big white ribbon. And the sunshine looked like yellow paint on the tops of the green hills behind us. And pretty soon some cars passed, and then there weren't any for a long space; and I heard daddy swearing under his breath, and he gripped my hand hard. I looked up at him, and he was chewing his cigar and looking hard down the road. I looked, too, and way way down where the road turned I could see something coming that looked like a dog.

"Sixty miles!" said daddy, chewing his cigar. "Sixty miles since the middle of the forenoon!"

And then pretty soon I saw that it was Shag coming, and he was running like he was awful tired. There were black streaks on his shaggy body, and his tongue was hanging out. He gave a couple of funny yelps, when he saw us and tried to run a little faster; but he was pretty wobbly and his legs kept getting tangled up with each other.

"Easy, pup," daddy said. "Easy, old kid. This is the home stretch."

And then daddy gripped my hand harder and stopped chewing his cigar. There was a big car coming awful fast behind Shag. But Shag didn't pay any attention. He was galloping toward us with his head bobbing up and down, and his eyes looked dim and dusty. From a long ways behind him the big car began to toot its horn, but it didn't slow down.

Daddy pushed me behind him toward the gate and jumped out into the road, waving his arms.

"Back, Shag!" he hollered. Shag was coming across the highway right in front of the car. "Slow down!" daddy hollered like thunder. "Slow down!" But the car didn't slow down, and it didn't swerve. It hit Shag, and knocked him over and over into the ditch, where he lay all in a heap and didn't get up.

Daddy is an awful big man; and he stood in the middle of the road and held up his hands, and he made the car stop. There were two men in the front seat and the man at the wheel was as big as daddy. And he had a red nose and a big ugly mouth with a black cigar in it.

"You big bum," daddy said. And even when he is real mad at mama, his voice never growls like that. "You big bum," he said. "You wouldn't stop to save a dog, would you?"

"Served him right," said the man. "Why didn't the mangy cur get out of the way?" And he swore at daddy and was getting ready to start the car again, when daddy reached in and kind of took hold of his neck and pulled him out of the seat. He had big, thick shoulders, the man had, and he tore daddy's collar off; and daddy hit him on the chin and he sat down hard on the pavement. When he got up, daddy hit him in the eye, and he sat down again a longer ways away and didn't get up. And the other man in the front seat, who was little and wore glasses, leaned over and said to daddy, but not loud enough for the other man to hear: "Hit him again," he said. "He's my brother-in-law. I've waited for ten years to see something like this happen."

But daddy didn't pay any attention. "Get up," he said, and lifted the big man up by the collar and pulled him over to where Shag was lying. "If the dog's dead, I'll bust you in two."

The big man kind of blubbered, and said: "I didn't mean to. Honest, I couldn't help it. I'll pay you for him." But daddy hung onto him tight and reached down and turned Shag over. Shag sniffed a couple of times and drew in some deep breaths, and then he got up with his feet all spraddled out. He shook his head, and then he looked around and saw daddy and wagged his stumpy tail, and leaned against daddy's leg.

"Beat it!" said daddy to the big man, and the man beat it. He ran to the car and climbed in and drove right away from there.

Daddy picked Shag up in his arms and said, "Open the gate, Peggy." And when we were walking up toward the house, he looked at me kind of funny and said: "Don't tell mama about me fighting." And I said, "All right." Daddy felt of the bruised place and said: "The fender hit him and knocked him clear," he said. "The big bum!"

When we got near the house, daddy said: "There'll be something doing when mama sees Shag. He'll be about as welcome as a bull snake."

Well, there was something doing, all right, when daddy walked in the door with Shag in his arms. Mama said "Bill!" just like she was swearing at daddy, and then she said, "*Where* did that dog come from?" And then she looked hard at daddy and said, "Yes, Mr. Hamilton took care of him, didn't he?" But daddy said to grandma: "Mother, here's what I call a regular dog. Followed us sixty miles since ten o'clock this morning. If one of your silky-haired peanut hounds had tried to do that," he said, "a squirrel would have eaten him up the first mile."

"Ten o'clock," said mama. "You know what time he started, do you?"

But daddy didn't pay any attention, and grandma brought something to eat for Shag and a pitcher of milk; and Shag ate everything up and drank up the whole pitcher of milk. Then he kind of wagged his tail and looked up at daddy and rolled over on the porch and slept.

There was an argument the next morning, just before we were ready to start. The sun hadn't come up behind the mountains yet; and it was cool and nice and I was pretty sleepy. Grandma stood on the porch and watched daddy get all the things into the car. Shag wasn't tired any more, and he was kind of dancing around just like he was awful glad that we was all together again, and mama said: "Of course, Bill, you're going to leave Shag here with grandma?" Daddy was tying the tent on the running board, and he looked up and said real short: "We are not."

"I don't believe," said mama, "that you ever had any intention of leaving Shag home."

"Well, he's here," said daddy, "and he stays with us. I can't impose on mother. He'd eat her out of house and home before we got back."

"Oh, that's all right," grandma said. "I'll be glad to take care of him." And daddy gave her kind of a quick look and she said, "Of course he *is* kind of bad about chasing the sheep. Some of the neighbors made remarks about him last time you were here."

Mama looked at grandma and then she looked at daddy, and lifted her chin a little higher and didn't say any more for a little while. When we were all ready to start, daddy said:

"Shag's pretty tired yet, and we will travel pretty fast, so we'll let him ride in the machine with us."

"Can't he ride on the running board?" mama asked. "No," said daddy, and he looked at mama like she had swore or something. "A man who let's his dog ride on the running board when he is traveling at high speed around curves ought to be shot."

"Well," said mama, "he can't stay in the back seat with Peggy."

"In that case," said daddy, and he kind of smiled, "I'll have the pleasure of his company in the front seat."

So mama and I climbed into the back seat, and daddy and Shag sat in front. My, but Shag looked pleased as we drove down the lane and out onto the highway. He was as tall as daddy, sitting down, and he watched everything that went by. And he was kind of laughing with his tongue hanging out.

I heard mama say, "I'll make him pay for this," and I said: "What mama?" "Never mind, Peggy," she told me. "See how pretty the river is down there."

Daddy was driving fast now, and the sun was just peeking above the mountains ahead of us. And daddy began to sing one of his favorite songs about the road to Mandalay, where the dawn comes up like thunder out of China.

Well, and pretty soon, we turned off the highway and went through the mountains and came into the Big Bend country.

We traveled on a road that was cut right out of the side of a mountain. There weren't any big fir trees any more, only a lot of little scrubby trees that daddy said were jack pines. It was an awful big country with hills as big as the roof of a big house; and way down below in the cañon, you could see water running between big boulders. The road was so much uphill that steam came out of the car. And once daddy had to wait a while and let it cool off. "My, what a rough country," mama said. "I think I'll take a picture of it, Bill." But daddy said, "Huh, you haven't seen anything. Wait till you come to the cañon of the Roaring River."

Once when we stopped to look at the view, Shag jumped out of the car and ran and chased a jack rabbit. But he didn't catch it, because the jack rabbit ran with his ears pointed back and would jump sideways and Shag would fall all over himself. Daddy laughed and said to mama, "Look at that dog, Clara. See how he's enjoying himself?" But mama didn't say anything, and pretty soon Shag came back with his tongue hanging out, kind of laughing.

After we had climbed some more and had gotten 'way up high, the country kind of flattened out. There wasn't any scrub pine any more, but there were lots of bushes as far as you could see, that daddy said was sagebrush. We haven't got any bushes like that down where we live. They smell kind of nice, and when you are close to them they look green; but when they were a long ways away, they looked kind of blue. While we were driving along, daddy waved his arm and said, "Well, Clara, that's a regular country, isn't it?" And mama kind of sniffed and said, "There isn't any shade. It'll probably be pretty hot before noon."

"Well, my lady," daddy said, "on our next vacation, we'll go down to the seashore where you can watch the jellyfish, and sit in the shade and eat lollipops."

"That would be nice," mama said. "Especially, if Shag wasn't there."

"You've got a long memory, haven't you," said daddy. "Can't you forget the dog for a while?"

"How can I," said mama, "when the mangy creature is right here in the car with me?"

Daddy hunched his shoulders and didn't say any more but stared straight ahead and drove awful fast. We camped that night in a cañon by a spring. After a while, it got dark, and daddy sat by the fire after we went to bed. The stars were bigger and brighter and more sparkly than they were down at our home. Shag was lying beside daddy by the fire. His head was up. There was a little breeze blowing down from the pinnacles, and Shag's nose was pointed into the breeze. There were bushes up above the spring a ways, and all of a sudden there came a terrible screech out of those bushes. Mama squeezed my hand hard and said, "What's that, Bill?"

"That's only a screech owl, Clara," daddy said. The fire was getting lower and there were only some red coals left. Way up above us, near the stars, there came a trembly kind of sound that rose way up high and then came trembling down again; and across the cañon, another one just like it answered it. "Goodness, Bill, what's that?" said mama. And daddy kind of laughed. "It's only a coyote, Clara."

But when we were nearly asleep, we heard the worst thing of all. I can't describe it, but it was kind of a shivery sound, worse than the coyote's. It came from across the cañon on the hillside. Shag stood up and kind of growled, and the hair was standing up straight on his neck. But daddy didn't seem to mind. He chuckled and said, "That was a timber wolf. He's a long ways from home."

"This is a terrible country," mama said. "I wish we hadn't come up here." But daddy only laughed and said, "Oh, they're harmless. Things will look different to you in the morning."

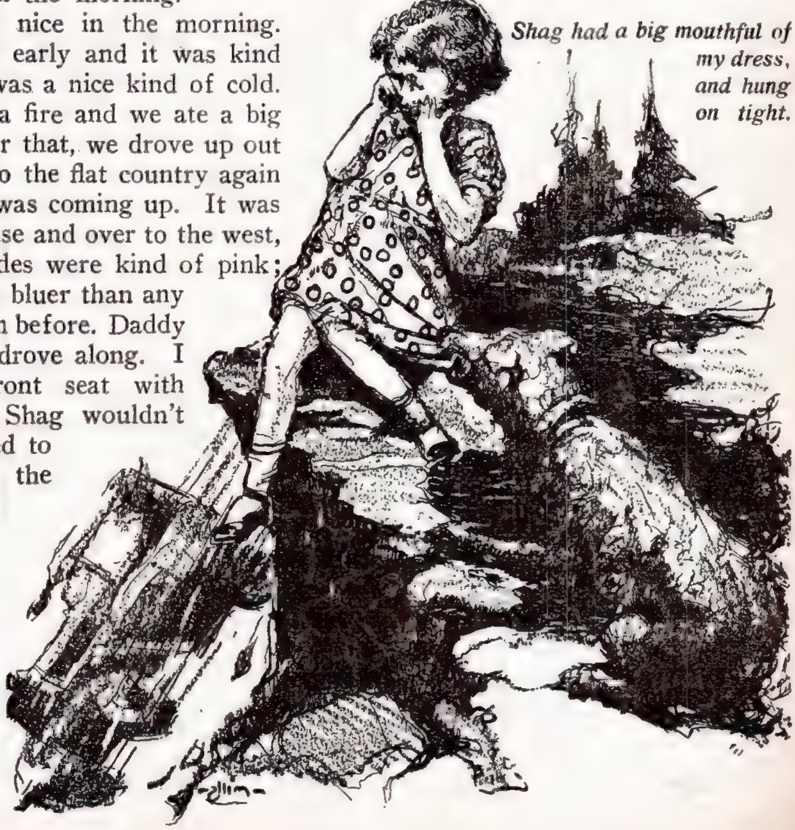
It was awful nice in the morning. We got up real early and it was kind of cold, but it was a nice kind of cold. So daddy built a fire and we ate a big breakfast. After that, we drove up out of the cañon into the flat country again just as the sun was coming up. It was a beautiful sunrise and over to the west, the white Cascades were kind of pink; and the sky was bluer than any blue I'd ever seen before. Daddy whistled as we drove along. I was in the front seat with daddy because Shag wouldn't ride. He wanted to run along in the sagebrush and sometimes we wouldn't see him for a long time. But daddy wasn't driving very fast, so Shag kept up to us.

Pretty soon after that, we came to the cañon of the Roaring River. And here is where I've got to be pretty careful telling about the Roaring River Cañon because that's the biggest part of the story. My, it gives me shivers now to think about it! I guess maybe I remember it so well because daddy and mama have told it so many times. When they talk about it, mama always takes hold of me pretty tight, and daddy bites hard on his cigar.

Well, we were driving along when daddy said over his shoulder to mama, "Get your camera ready, Clara. We're almost to the cañon."

Mama looked all around and said, "You're joking, aren't you, Bill? I don't see any cañon."

Daddy pointed ahead and said, "Do you see that ledge of rock stretching from east to west ahead of us?" "Yes," mama said, "but that's only a little ways



Shag had a big mouthful of my dress, and hung on tight.

away." Daddy laughed and said, "Well, that's the other side of Roaring River Cañon and it's five hundred feet deep."

"Bill," mama kind of gasped. "You're joking, aren't you? You'd better drive slower." And daddy said, "Oh, we aren't there yet."

But pretty soon we went over a little kind of rise and daddy slowed the car down, and it looked like the whole world had dropped away from in front of us. It was awful deep, so deep that there wasn't any sunshine down there. And way, way down below, we could see the white river, and the noise the river made sounded like a train in a tunnel.

"Look at it, Clara," daddy said. "Nothing like it in all the world—the Roaring River Cañon." The road led right down to the edge of the cañon. Daddy had stopped the car so we could get a good view. Mama said:

"It's terrible, Bill. How do we ever get across?"

"I knew you'd be surprised," daddy said. "There's an easy grade down into the cañon and a bridge at the bottom. Up the cañon you can see where the road on the other side is cut."

We looked, and sure enough, we could see way up the cañon where the road turned up the other bank. From where we were it looked like it was awful narrow and steep.

"Are you sure, Bill," mama said, "that it's safe to drive down into that awful place?"

"Of course it is," said daddy. "All the travel from the cow country used to come down this way."

It was downhill to the edge of the cañon and daddy drove on a little farther and then stopped. Over to the right was a big bunch of rocks. It was right on the edge, and mama said, "Let's go over on that point, Bill, so I can get a good view of the full depth of the cañon."

"All right," daddy said. "You stay here Peggy, and we'll be back in a minute. It's pretty rough going over there."

So daddy and mama got out of the car and went over to the point. Daddy helped mama climb up, and pretty soon they were standing at the top. I saw mama point over past the car and I looked over that way, too, and there was Shag standing up on another point, with his tongue hanging out, waiting for us to start again.

You know, I was just a little girl then, and I didn't know any better; but I got kind of restless waiting for them and I slid back and forth on the seat for a while. Then, I took hold of the steering wheel and wiggled it a little, but pretty soon I got tired of that. But daddy and mama were still taking pictures up on the point, so I took hold of one of the levers and rattled it a while, and then I took hold of the other one but it wouldn't rattle at all, so I pulled on it hard like daddy does when he stops the car, and then let go of it. The car kind of creaked a little and the wheel wiggled when I didn't touch it, so I played with the lever some more, and pretty soon the car began to move.

Well, that was fun, so I stood up in the seat and leaned against the back. The car was moving all by itself down the hill toward the cañon. I wasn't scared till mama screamed, an awful kind of scream that seemed to take hold of something inside of me and squeeze tight so I could hardly breathe.

"Bill," mama said. "The car!"

The car was going pretty fast now and swaying from one side to the other and I hung on tight. Daddy is an awfully big man and he jumped way down from the rocks and rolled over and over and got up and ran and he hollered, "Jump, Peggy! Jump!" But I was awful scared so I hung on tight.

I looked ahead once, and then I didn't look any more, because down there, at the edge of the cañon, the road took a sharp turn to the left and on the other side of the road, there wasn't anything at all. Daddy fell down once and then he got up again and yelled, "Jump, Peggy! For God's sake, jump!" But I was too scared. And then daddy hollered, "Shag! Shag!"—just like he was crying, "Go get her, Shag!"

Shag must have been running all the time because I saw him on the road where the car started from, and he was running awful fast after the car. The car kind of pumped around, and I didn't see him for a minute, and then I saw him again. He was closer and my, how he did run, kind of humping his back and his funny ears laid flat against his neck. And then he was beside the car, and he made a big jump at me and caught hold of my dress with his teeth but I hung on tight. But Shag hung on, too, and kind of braced himself against the side of the car. Then the car hit the bank where the road turned, and bounced up in the air and that tore me loose. I fell and fell and I could see the edge of the bank way up above me. Then we bounced and kind of slid in some bushes right on the edge. Shag still had a big mouthful of my dress and hung on tight. Way down below me I could see the car falling, turning over and over and kind of bouncing, then it hit the bottom on some big boulders, and all flattened out like a broken umbrella.

Oh my!

Shag was all spraddled out in the bushes, and he hung onto me tight. I cried and cried for mama because I was all scratched and there was a bump on my head. But every time I moved, Shag hung on tighter. Then I saw daddy up above us against the sky. And daddy hollered, "Lie still, Peggy. Lie perfectly still and don't move." And he said, "Hold her, Shag, old boy, hold her!" Then he called over his shoulder, "She's all right, Clara. Stay there and wait. Don't come near the edge, Clara."

Then daddy came down, backward, like he was coming down a ladder, and hanging onto the bushes. When he got down close, he said, "Are you hurt, Peggy?" But I kept on crying because I thought I was hurt pretty badly. So he reached down with one hand and pulled me out of the bushes and said, "Let go, Shag. It's all right, Shag. Let go, old kid."

Well, it took daddy a long time to carry me up to the top again and help Shag, too. Mama was waiting at the top and she grabbed me away from daddy and hugged me so tight I couldn't breathe. And she sat down and rocked me like I was a little baby again and rocked and rocked. Daddy was sitting on the bank with his face in his hands, and he was shaking all over like he was cold. And Shag sat there beside daddy with his tongue hanging out, kind of laughing. And after a while daddy turned and reached out and patted Shag, and that was the only time I ever saw tears running down daddy's face.

"The wire-haired breed," daddy said. "The wire-haired breed, Clara. Where would one of your silky-haired peanut pups have been in a jack pot like that?"

And that's all there was to it. No, not quite all, either. Some people going by picked us up and took us to Big Bend, where daddy saw Hank's friend and bought a new car. When we were driving along, mama had Shag in the back seat with her. Mama ran her fingers through his hair and said, "He's a nice, great big dog, Peggy. Just about the nicest dog in the world, isn't he?" And she didn't say it like she was trying to be nice, either, but meant every single word of it.

Daddy heard her say it, too; and I think he liked it because right away after that he began to sing his favorite song about the flying fishes, where the dawn comes up like thunder out of China.

Comanche

By Max Brand

Illustrated by J. J. CASEY

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

TWO brothers, Andrew and David Apperley, return to the West with a large wolf dog, Comanche, which Andrew, a prominent rancher, has brought East to be "tamed" by a circus man.

While the brothers are in the East they watch the escape of a prisoner, "Single" Jack Deems, from Blackwell's Island. The dog, Comanche, breaks his chain and swims to the rescue of Single Jack. The Apperleys drag man and dog onto their yacht, from which they are watching the escape. They hide both in the hold.

The guard boat comes alongside, and Comanche howls savagely. The police sergeant is about to hurl a smoke bomb down the hatch, when Single Jack dashes past him and escapes again.

Twice on the way West, Single Jack tries to get possession of Comanche.

Andrew tells David about a powerful rustler, Alec Shodress, who is his enemy.

The brothers reach the ranch and are at dinner when a dark man enters the room. Andrew invites the man, whose name is Whaley, to have dinner.

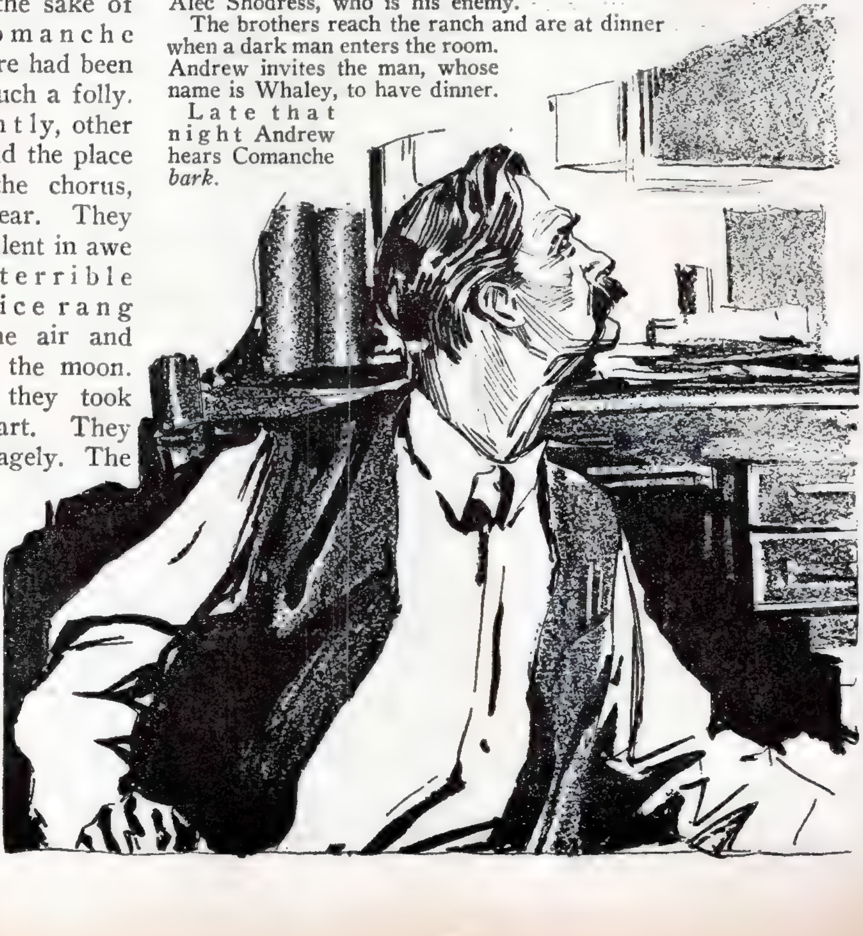
Late that night Andrew hears Comanche *bark*.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PRICE FOR COMANCHE

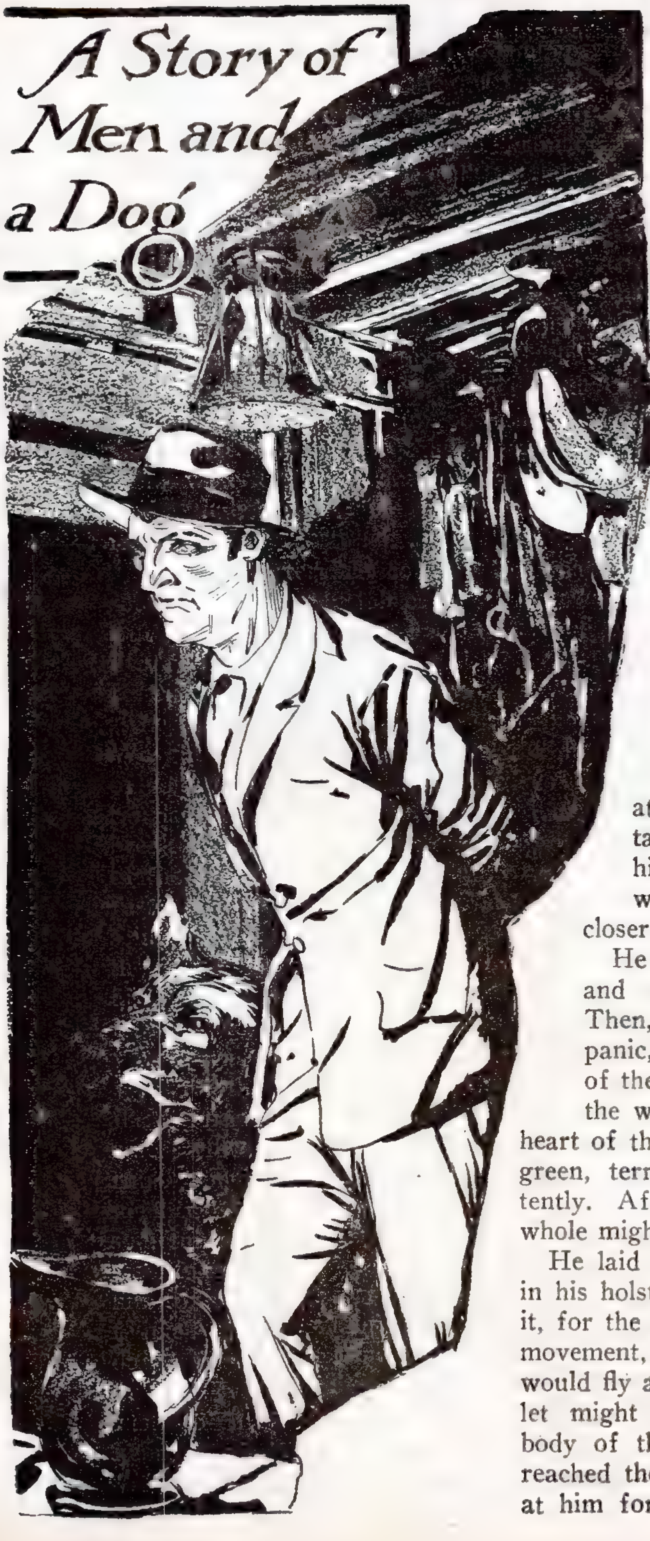
ALL the noises that a wolf makes are businesslike and have a meaning. His growl, his snarl, his whimper, his howl, and all the ringing cries of the chase, have definite meanings, and any wise old trapper can tell you exactly what words stand for most of them. But barking is usually a mere noise. It may have fury in it; it may have happiness; it may be mere noise for the sake of noise. Comanche never before had been guilty of such a folly.

Instantly, other dogs around the place took up the chorus, far and near. They had been silent in awe while the terrible wolf voice rang through the air and shrilled at the moon. But now they took sudden heart. They barked savagely. The



At the rancher's invitation, the criminal stepped into the doorway, and out of it, with a movement swift as a boxer's.

A Story of Men and a Dog



rancher could not help smiling as he listened.

He looked out the open doorway, and after his head had been turned from his lamp, for a moment, he could see the dim stars sprinkled low along the edge of the sky, like gold dust sprinkling velvet of the darkest blue. The sharp taste of alkali was in the wind that puffed lazily through the entrance, and he closed his eyes and smiled again. For it was a good world, in the eyes of Andrew Apperley. He only hoped that his idle younger brother might find in this new region some sort of challenge which would make a man of him.

Then he turned back to his work and kept busily at it until he felt that the distant eyes of the stars, behind him, were replaced by others, watching him coldly, and closer at hand.

He raised his head and waited, and felt his blood turn cold. Then, whirling about in a sudden panic, he saw, just on the verge of the shadows at his door, where the weak lamplight met the black heart of the night, two eyes filled with green, terrible fire, watching him intently. After that, he distinguished the whole mighty form of Comanche!

He laid his hand upon the revolver in his holster, but he hesitated to draw it, for the instant that he made such a movement, he knew that the monster would fly at him. And though his bullet might plow straight through the body of the wolf dog, still, unless it reached the heart, Comanche would be at him for a few dying slashes. Andrew Apperley knew beforehand what even one of those white sword strokes could mean.

He grew tenser. He thought of calling out. But he felt that a call, or anything more than a move of the hand, would bring terrible danger flying at his throat.

So he endured through a few terrible seconds until a man's voice said gently from the black of the night:

"I came down to get Comanche. But I thought that perhaps I'd better see you first, about the price!"

Into the glimmering verge of the circle of light, stepped the form of "Single" Jack.

"Deems! Deems!" exclaimed the rancher. "Come in, man!"

The criminal stepped into the doorway and out of it, with a movement swift as a boxer's. Having removed himself from the glow which framed him in the doorway as an excellent target for any marksman, he took up his position against the wall, at an angle from which he could watch both the rancher and the open door, with all of the perils which might lurk beyond it.

Comanche, still snarling silently, with a lifted lip, slunk in with his master and planted himself in front of him, his mane bristling as he faced Apperley.

"Sit down," said the rancher, "and tell me how in the name of all that is wonderful, you managed to get across the open range to this place! Didn't you know that they were looking for you all up and down the line of the railroad?"

The other nodded gravely.

"They were looking for me," he admitted, "but I was looking for them, too, and so I drifted along until I heard Comanche calling."

There were many, many things that Apperley would have been glad to know, but he felt that it was useless to ask. What would be the sense in addressing questions to the wolf dog which crouched at the foot of this strange youth? And in the dark face and the black eyes of Single Jack, he saw, or thought he saw, the same wolfish spirit which caused Comanche to bare his fangs. How had he eluded the searchers? How had he journeyed across the range? Whom had he dared to ask questions of? But there was no way of drawing out the answer.

"After I got Comanche," went on the other, "I couldn't help remembering that you helped him fish me out of the river when I was spent. I owe you something for that, and I owe you something for Comanche. About what does the bill come to?"

"I've never put a price on such things," said the rancher, drawing him out.

"You never have?"

"Never," said Andrew Apperley, finding it a little hard to meet those dark, fathomless eyes. For there was no human kindness in them. There was nothing but the dark watchfulness of a panther. Neither kind nor unkind, but ceaselessly alert, and always with a haunting fire ready to appear in them.

What were those eyes when the fire burned brightly, Apperley wondered.

"You can make a guess. There's a price for everything," said Single Jack.

"For everything?"

"Why, yes. You're a business man!"

"But for fishing a man out of the river?"

"Well, there's ways of guessing at a price on me," said the youth as gravely as ever. "The government has staked eleven thousand dollars on me—dead or alive."

"Dead or alive!" murmured the rancher.

"Yes."

"Any man who dares to fight you and can down you gets that much?"

"Yes."

"And any sneak who can worm his way up to you in the dark and put a bullet through your head gets that much, too?"

"Yes."

"It's hard!" said Apperley. "It's hard practice!"

The other shook his head.

"I don't ask anything better," he said. "I don't ask them if they mind when I blow a safe, do I? There's lots of good men that have been ruined because I've cracked a safe or lifted some bonds, here and there. So why shouldn't the government put a price on my head?"

It was not the logic of this so much as the calm conviction with which it was stated that amazed Apperley.

"In one way," he consented, "it makes a business out of it."

"Or a good gambling deal, at least," said Single Jack. "With the cards crooked on both sides!"

"Crooked?"

"Is there anything that they haven't tried, to get me? Even bribing people that *might* have been my friends. Even poison——"

"Hello! Not poison!"

"Let some one put eleven thousand on your head, Apperley, and see how long it will be that they hunt you fair and square! However, I don't mind. I crook the cards on them, too. I bribe cashiers, now and then. I stack the deck whenever I can. And so we're all square. I've given them as much as they've given me. The rope that's to hang me is still on the stretch. And I hold no grudges against them, or anybody. I hold no kind feelings, either, except——"

He paused, and the dangerous glimmer that had come into his eyes faded and was lost in a shadow of perplexity.

"Except with you, Apperley!" he said. "You could have had that eleven thousand dollars, if you wanted it. Just by speaking my name—and you didn't. Why not?"

His amazement stared blankly at the face of the rancher.

"Why, man, being on my boat, you were a guest, weren't you?"

"Eleven thousand dollars' worth of guest?" sneered the criminal, his eyes flashing into the very soul of the other.

"Or eleven million dollars' worth of guest," said Apperley firmly.

"I see," said the other, as cold as ice. "Your honor got mixed into it. Your honor wouldn't let you. Was that it?"

"Perhaps you can call it that!"

"We'll let that slide, for a minute," said Single Jack Deems very crisply, as though he were filled with doubts concerning the current value of honor in his host or in any other man in the world. "We'll let that slide, and I'll simply ask you please to explain what is the price that you want for Comanche?"

"Is there a price on everything?"

"You're a business man," said the other for the second time. "I don't have to talk nonsense to you."

"You'd have to pay me," said Apperley, "for the pride I have in owning Comanche."

"That's one item."

"Then for the long hunt I followed on his trail."

"Very well."

"My time has a value. I spent twenty or thirty full working days trailing him."

"Yes."

"I thought, planned, dreamed how to get him. I imported a pack of dogs and watched them slaughtered. I carted him all the way East with me, and there I spent more time and money over him."

"It's a bill. Add it up."

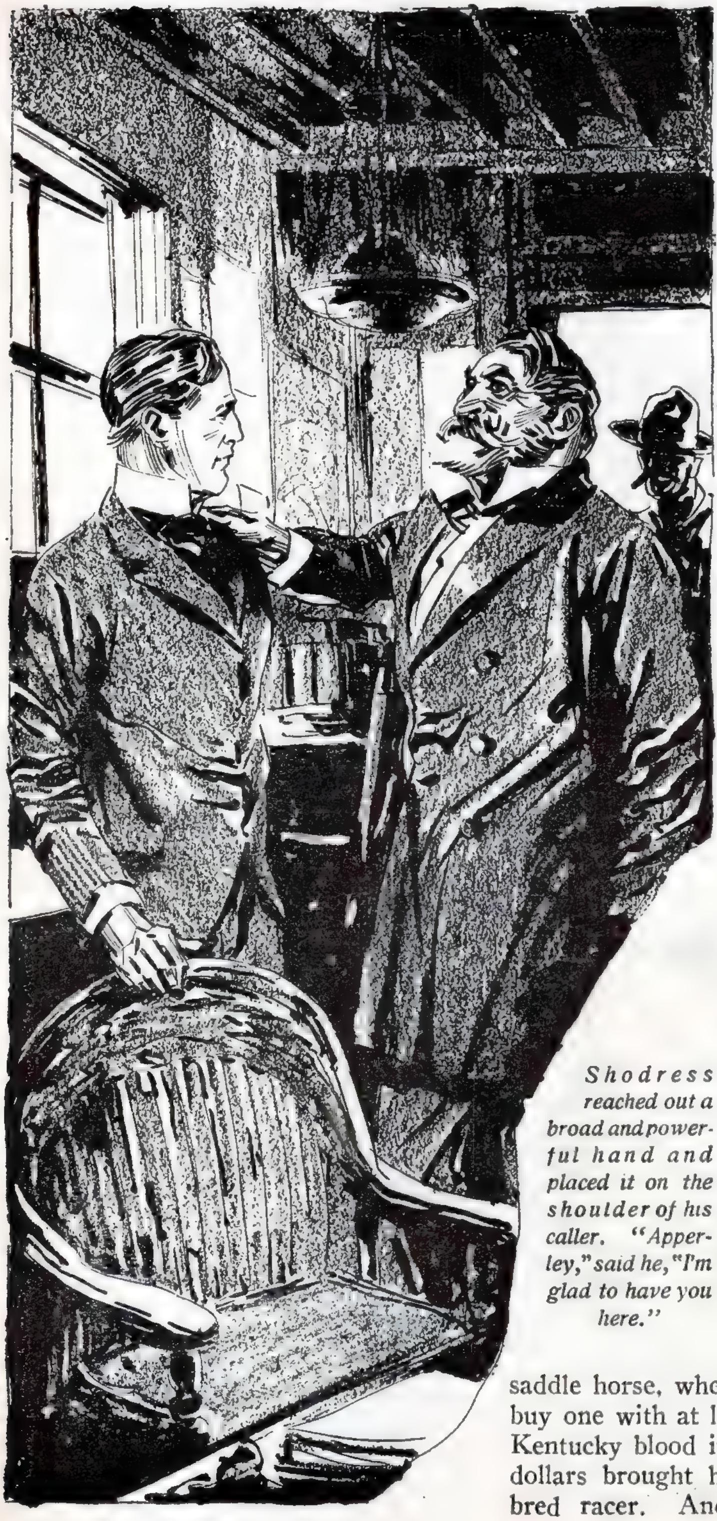
"Still, more than all the rest, I am fond of the great brute, Deems!"

"I'll admit that, too!"

"Now, on the other hand, I consider it shameful to sell a dog for money—shameful for a rich man like myself."

"I'll pay you for your shame, too," said Single Jack.

"How much money have you then, to



Shodress reached out a broad and powerful hand and placed it on the shoulder of his caller. "Apperley," said he, "I'm glad to have you here."

invest? I don't mean to ask that, but what would you do if I asked you several thousand?"

"Five thousand, say?"

"Yes, let's say five thousand."

The left hand of Mr. Deems slipped into his pocket and suddenly five one-thousand-dollar bills lay on the table before the rancher.

"And that settles the ownership of Comanche, I hope?" asked Single Jack.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOLF DOG'S ANSWER

It should be borne in mind that Andrew Apperley was not only a man of money, but he was one who was accustomed to taking what pleased him, regardless of the price. But in those days money meant more than it does today. One paid five dollars, perhaps, for an Indian pony which was good enough for most of the uses of the range, and one paid thirty dollars for a very well-broken saddle horse, whereas a hundred would buy one with at least a liberal strain of Kentucky blood in it. And a thousand dollars brought home a fine thoroughbred racer. And here was a fellow whose fortune was his wits calmly laying down five thousand dollars on the table for the sake of a wild dog!

It was more than a mere shock to the rancher. It slipped back the doors of his mind and allowed an entire new vision to enter—a vision of a Deems quite other than the man he had been picturing before. It was plain to him, at a glance, that money was a mere nothing in the life of this fellow. He could not help saying gravely: "Tell me, Deems, what does money mean to you?"

A touch of blankness appeared in the eyes of the youngster, and then he replied with an equal gravity. "Why, everybody else is out for it. I suppose that it's worth the game!"

"Very well," said the rancher, "no matter what money is worth to you, your money is worth nothing to me. I can't take the five thousand dollars."

He passed it back.

Single Jack Deems regarded him with a keen scrutiny, not as one who admires largeness of soul, but as one who searches for a hidden and unworthy motive.

He pocketed the money slowly.

"Still," said the rancher, "I don't give you the dog for nothing."

Jack Deems smiled a little, as though the idea of charity were too irresistibly ridiculous even for a moment's consideration.

"All right," he said. "I guess what you want, but I'll tell you in the beginning that I'm not that kind."

"Not what kind, Deems?"

"You've got a grudge and you want me to wipe it out for you, eh? Is that it?"

"Man, man, I handle my own enemies! No, it's not that!"

The other waited.

"It's a job, Deems, that would keep you in this part of the country. Could you stand that?"

"Where else can I go with the dog?" asked Single Jack gloomily. He cast a glance toward the door.

"But if I stay here with him," he said, "I'll be hounded across the mountains—and it's easier to hide in alleys that you know than in mountains that you don't!"

The rancher shook his head and explained: "You're in no danger out here except the danger that you make for yourself."

"I'm not known, then?" asked Single Jack, smiling a little, with an odd mixture of vanity and gloom.

"Not a whit known," replied the rancher.

Single Jack waited, his face as enigmatic as usual, and it was plain that he placed not the slightest credence in what he heard. Apperley went on to explain.

"News comes slowly out this way," he said. "Papers may be half a year old before they fall into your hands. They're almost sure to be a month old, and so you form the habit of reading newspapers as though they were ancient history. In that way, you pay attention to the stories, but not to the names. Half the men out here could hardly tell you the name of the President of these United States, because that doesn't matter. What matters in the cattle country is the name of your boss and the names of the horses in your string. Other things are decorations. You understand? And Single Jack Deems, with a list of dead men as long as his arm is no more out here than John Deems, cow-puncher, if he cares to start that way. And after that, men will take you just as they find you!"

Perhaps the rancher was enlarging upon the truth a little, but at least he had painted a picture which attracted the elusive attention of the younger man, and that was what Apperley wanted.

"It's a queer idea," said Single Jack. He looked far away, as though at a vision. "A very queer idea," he repeated. "Do you half mean it?"

"I mean it altogether."

"You mean, Apperley, that I could actually walk down the street of a cow town and let men look in my face, just as it is, just the way God made me?"

"I mean exactly that!"

Deems frowned at the floor.

"Why, man," went on the rancher, "literally thousands of men have come West because their crimes made it hot for them in the East. But out here, they're lost. I think that half of them turn into decent fellows. A quarter of them are half good and half bad, and it depends on how you take them. The rest of them are born bad, and they stay bad. They wind up with their boots on, and lead in their bodies, most of that lot."

The other nodded.

"I see that you mean what you say," he murmured. "And it would be odd to do that—to walk down a street with your hands in your pockets—not caring—to sit in a room without your back to the wall——"

He broke off, and a violent shudder passed through him. For an instant, he looked a very facsimile of the wolf at his feet, and as though he sensed something wrong, Comanche turned his head and looked up into the face of his master, with a snarl lifting his upper lip and exposing his gleaming teeth.

"Well," sighed Deems, "how many days would it be before some one recognized my face and used eleven thousand dollars' worth of memory?"

"He wouldn't shoot you from behind," said the rancher, "because if he did, he would be strung up as high as a kite in less than two minutes by the other men in the room. And he probably wouldn't be able to shoot you from in front. At least, I suppose that that's a danger that you don't often worry about."

"Do you mean one man?"

"Yes. We never allow two men to pick on one—not out here!"

"Why"—Single Jack smiled, with a sudden and strange illumination of face—"if what you say is true, I might live another five years as safe as could be!"

"Five years, man? Yes, or fifty!"

"I'm not a fool," said Single Jack quietly.

"How long did you have back East?"

"They were dodging me pretty closely. Perhaps five days. Perhaps five weeks. With good luck, I might have lasted a whole year. But that was hardly likely. They had me in their hands twice in the last nine months."

"You were going back to die, then?"

"Not that. I was going back to play another hand at the game. You don't like to quit while you're winning, you know!"

The rancher stared. In the presence of this boy, he repeatedly had a feeling of complete helplessness. He could reach far, but never quite far enough to comprehend the depths of this nature.

"Let me tell you," said Mr. Apperley, "that if you act like a white man out here, you can live as long as the end of your century. I mean that. And yet you'll have plenty of action, of any kind that you want! But I should say that the chief thing for you to do, just now, is to take up with the suggestion that I make to you."

"I'm listening."

"I have on my hands, just now, my younger brother. He's a boy perfectly honest, straightforward, frank, open. He's strong in his hands, a good shot, a straight eye, a clear head. He's educated to be a lawyer, and he has the making of a good one in him. But the only thing that he's ever been able to take an interest in is the hunting of big game. Now, finally, he's grown heated about a great idea of his, which is to go up into the town of the cattle rustler, Shodress, and there open up his lawyer's office, and make it his business to fight out the cases which I—and other cattlemen—wish to push through against some of the crooked cattlemen. He has been appointed special prosecuting attorney. Now, once he gets there, his life will be worth about a damaged nickel. He is perfectly willing to fight any man in the world, especially with guns. But he doesn't understand the Western system of fanning a gun. And he hasn't spent a lifetime of practice at hitting the mark, as most of these gun fighters have done. Before he is a day in Yeoville, one of them will pick a fight with him and shoot him six times through the heart before he can strike the ground. You understand?"

"Yes," said the other calmly. "I've seen it done."

Mr. Apperley did not ask him to enlarge the thought. But he could not help wondering whether, at the time he had seen it done, Single Jack had been on the stage or in the audience.

"Now," said Apperley, "the price that I want you to pay me, the price I ask for Comanche, and for your own life, when we fished you out of the river, is to take my brother to Yeoville and there try to nurse him through about the first ten days. After that time, he'll be on his feet. He'll know those men, and those men will know him, and I don't think that either side will be apt to take liberties with the other. But the first days are the fatal ones to be passed. And I tell you, Deems, that if you can see my brother through that critical period, you may be giving the world a useful citizen in the place of a useless waster!"

"Ten days?" asked the criminal.

"About that."

"It's a long time—for me!"

"Yes—I know it."

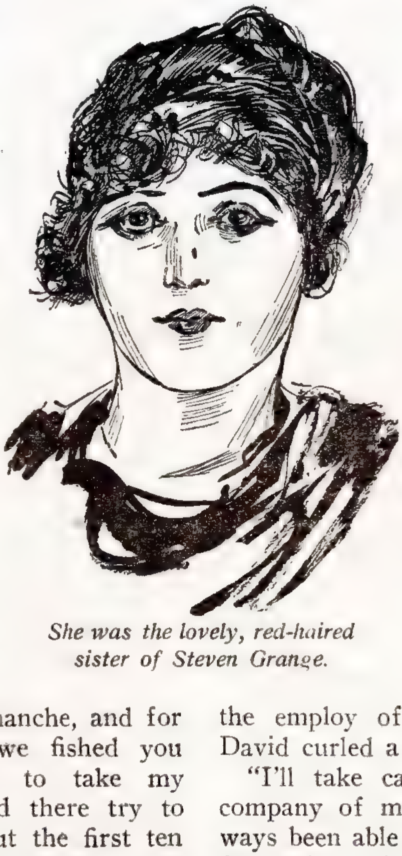
"For Comanche? After that, I'd own him by rights?"

"Exactly."

"Whist!" said the criminal. "Comanche, shall I go?"

The monster turned, and flattening his ears, he whined.

"Listen! Listen!" breathed Single Jack. "He tells me to take you up, and I shall. But look at him now. Do you think that he really cares for me, Apperley?"



She was the lovely, red-haired sister of Steven Grange.

CHAPTER X.

CAUGHT RED-HANDED.

IT was necessary for Andrew Apperley to use a good deal of diplomacy with his brother. For when he suggested that Single Jack accompany him as a bodyguard to secure him from the possible attacks of Shodress and the hired murderers in the employ of that scoundrel, young David curled a lip of scorn.

"I'll take care of myself in every company of men," said he. "I've always been able to stand on my feet before this, and I don't expect suddenly to stop, now. As for their guns, I have a pair of Colts, and I've been practicing with them, between you and me, very steadily for the last three days."

Andrew Apperley said no more in the way of argument upon this point. He did not even try to describe the painful years of effort by which one of these same Westerners attempted to tame a Colt before he felt, as the saying went, that he could ride it.

He shifted his grounds abruptly.

"Naturally, Dave, I wanted to use an argument which I thought might convince you of the actual utility of Deems. But between you and me, I'm sure that he'll be nothing but a terrible handicap."

"He would be that—if I let him," assented David with much surety.

"But I think, Dave, that if you were to take him along with you, it might prove the actual making of the fellow. It might be what he needs to jerk him out of the Slough of Despond, you know! You might be the actual making of him, Dave!"

"Nothing will make him," said David, with his usual cocksureness. "He was born bad, he's grown bad, and he can't help dying bad."

"It's rather un-Christian to cut a man off and damn him before he's had even a first chance!"

"I'd rather be a bit un-Christian than totally illogical. I really would, old fellow. This Single Jack Deems is a man-murdering scoundrel, and he deserves to hang. I don't want him under my wing."

"But I tell you, Dave, that unless a strong and resolute fellow like yourself takes him in hand, he's utterly damned."

The exquisite poisoned point of flattery touched David to the heart. He wavered in his resolution.

"He'll have to take strict orders from me!" he exclaimed.

"That could be arranged," said Andrew, though he felt the ground slip rapidly from beneath his feet.

"Then I'll take him along with me and give him his chance!"

Quite hopeless, Andrew Apperley went to Single Jack and found the criminal lying under a fig tree, with his hands clasped beneath his head. Over him rose the ominous form of Comanche, teeth bared and mane bristling.

"Whist, boy!" said the youth.

The mighty Comanche retreated and lay down, his head on his paws, his reddened eyes constantly on the alert to follow the rancher. Mr. Andrew Apperley was filled with deep wonder to see how quickly and how perfectly this slender young man had reduced Comanche to perfect obedience.

The thief and gunman rolled upon one elbow—upon his left elbow, leaving, as always, the snaky strength and speed of his right hand unimpeded.

As Apperley looked into the dull black eyes of the other, he felt suddenly how useless any attempt at subtlety on his part would be, so he simply said:

"My brother is playing a very bad part. He doesn't want you along with him as a guard, he says. He says that he won't have you at all, except with the feeling that he's giving you a chance to reform. And you'll have to take strict orders from him on your behavior!"

He waited. Not a single alteration appeared in the deep, black eyes of Single Jack.

"You understand me, Deems. I realize how absurd it all is. I simply want you to know the truth."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"What I expect you to do is to throw over the job, of course. But what I *hope* that you'll do, is to swallow your pride and go along with David and even let him talk down to you a little."

Beyond all the expectations of Apperley, the gun man answered softly, for his voice was rarely raised: "I'll go along with him and do as you say."

"Do you actually mean it?"

"I do."

"I tell you what, Deems, it means the saving of his life, in spite of himself. Then if that's arranged, you'd better let me have you and David meet for a talk."

"Of course."

The attitude of David was particularly difficult, on this morning.

"When you touch a nettle, grasp it hard," said David to his brother—and he straightway assumed the most overbearing attitude. It was plain that he wished to establish instantly and once for all that he was to be the master during the days that followed.

"During the time that you're with me, Deems," said David, "you'll take my orders about everything, you understand?"

It was a volley between wind and water, to be sure. Andrew Apperley turned a little pale. Such a speech to a real Westerner would have been a tolerable excuse for a gun play on the spot. But to Apperley's amazement, Single Jack's expression did not alter. He merely nodded.

"And you'll keep yourself out of the way of trouble. That's the main thing."

"Very well," said Single Jack, as meekly as could be.

"In that case," said David Apperley, allowing himself a smile of triumph in the direction of his brother, "we may get on together."

That day they departed for Yeoville, and the stronghold of the king of the rustlers, Shodress.

They traveled in a buckboard, which was swept along by a span of fine horses. They had three saddle horses tethered behind, and their luggage was piled into the back of the wagon. Half a dozen law books were included. With such a meager preparation, young David was prepared to storm the bulwarks of the enemy!

After he was gone, many doubts possessed the mind of Andrew Apperley. For the last bit of the picture that remained to him was not of his brother and the departing wagon, but of the monster wolf dog which slunk along with them, fifty yards away in the brush. It seemed to him that there was danger, danger, danger lying before the face of his only brother.

He was not reassured by a note that came back to him two days later.

> DEAR ANDY: I'm here in Yeoville, in the Shodress Hotel. I could have gone to the other hotel, of course, but I thought that by coming directly here, I'd show them that I'm not afraid. Shodress is not in the town. The moment that he arrives, I'm going to see him and lay my cards on the table, face up.
>
> At least, they'll have no chance to call me a sneak, in this part of the world. When the first man comes in, accused of rustling, I'm going to push the case through as hard as I can. On the first case of all, depends a good deal. I hope you'll see to it that the man who is first sent is somebody with a very black case against him. It will be necessary to have the thing very plain before I can get any favorable verdict out of a jury here. You are entirely right. They are all Shodress men, and they hate the very name of Apperley. When I signed on the hotel register, the clerk turned pale.
>
> In the meantime, I'm in higher spirits than I've been for years. This will be a great game. As ever, DAVE.

There followed, as though entirely by afterthought:

> About young Deems. It seems I was right in taking up a firm line with him. No matter what a dare-devil he may be considered in the East, in this new environment he does not seem at all sure of himself. He seems rather timid, even shrinking. But he does all that I tell him to do. He asks no questions, and he never answers back. I think I can assure you that the cure is going to work with him. But he seems to me rather a sneaking fellow, and when he's saved, I wonder if the job will have been worth while?

Over that letter, Andrew Apperley pored with perspiration starting out on his face. It did not seem to him possible that, knowing what was in the past of Deems, his brother could be so extremely obtuse in his treatment of the man. But here were the facts, set down in black and white!

Everything else in the letter seemed to him in the highest degree foolish and dangerous. To place himself in the Shodress Hotel was literally to abandon all defense. Andrew knew that there was little or no honor in Shodress and many of his men.

He was on the verge of sending off a hard-riding messenger to call back his brother at once, but this he decided not to do. In the first place, David would probably not answer such a peremptory summons. In the second place, perhaps it was better for the young man to work out his own salvation, and that could not be done without some considerable risk.

So Andrew set his teeth and resigned himself to waiting.

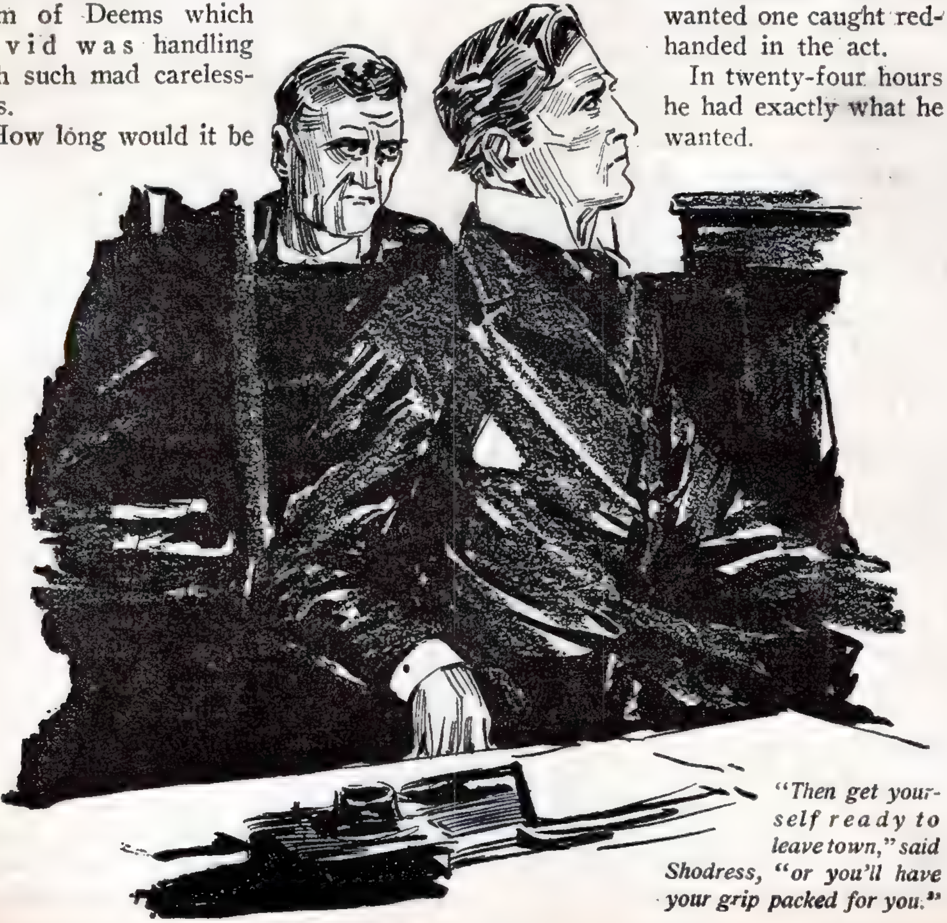
Every moment of the day he was filled with worry for his young and inexperienced brother, and for the high explosive in the form of Deems which David was handling with such mad carelessness.

How long would it be before Single Jack Deems burst out in fire?

He thought of these things ceaselessly. They wakened him in the middle of the night and fixed his eyes upon the the swirling darkness above him. But he had no obvious answers for these riddles, and so he waited.

In the meantime, he prepared to send up the first rustler so that David could have an opportunity to show his wares as a lawyer in the town of Yeoville, and so score his first defeat. But that first rustler must be one caught absolutely in the act. The word went out from the home ranch of Andrew Apperley to all his men. It was no longer necessary to let the rustlers go. There was now a lawyer to fight the cases through in Yeoville. And he wanted one caught redhanded in the act.

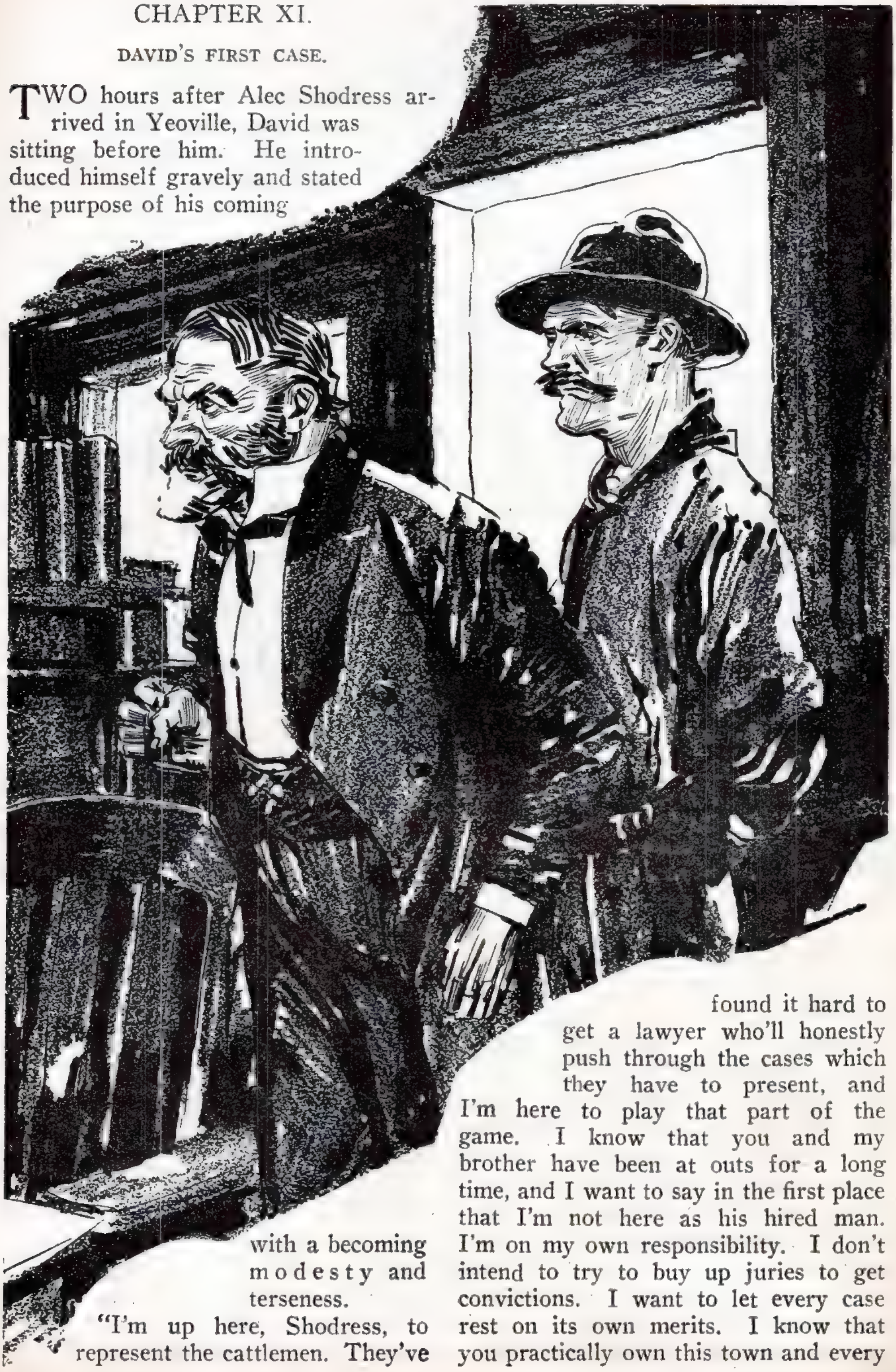
In twenty-four hours he had exactly what he wanted.



"Then get yourself ready to leave town," said Shodress, "or you'll have your grip packed for you."

CHAPTER XI.

DAVID'S FIRST CASE.



TWO hours after Alec Shodress arrived in Yeoville, David was sitting before him. He introduced himself gravely and stated the purpose of his coming with a becoming modesty and terseness.

"I'm up here, Shodress, to represent the cattlemen. They've found it hard to get a lawyer who'll honestly push through the cases which they have to present, and I'm here to play that part of the game. I know that you and my brother have been at outs for a long time, and I want to say in the first place that I'm not here as his hired man. I'm on my own responsibility. I don't intend to try to buy up juries to get convictions. I want to let every case rest on its own merits. I know that you practically own this town and every man in it. And I have to ask you if you're going to let me have a halfway fair chance, or are you going to begin to block me from the start?"

Now, that was a speech which David had conned over and over, and before he spoke it, he felt that it was about all that any man could say, with perfect frankness, under the conditions.

However, he was not prepared for the reply which he received from Shodress.

That gentleman reached out a broad and powerful hand and placed it on the shoulder of his caller.

"Apperley," said he, "I'm glad to have you here! There's been a long and bad misunderstanding between your brother and me, but there's no real reason for it. As a matter of fact, there have been a lot of low hounds that've gone about to make trouble between us. Why? I'll tell you in a word! In this part of the range, to be frank, there are two big men—Andrew Apperley in the lowlands, and Alec Shodress in the mountains. The little skunks that lie in between us, jealous of both of us, have been carrying tales. They tell me all sorts of yarns about how Apperley has it in for me, and how he's trying to get me. They go back to Apperley and tell him stories about how I'm the head of the rustlers that are working the herds and cutting off thousands of them every year.

"Well, sir, I'm an old hand in this country. I know the people, and so I don't listen to their talk. But Apperley is a newcomer. He doesn't understand, and he takes the yarns too seriously. He doesn't stop to think that among other things, I've got a cracking big herd of cows, myself, and I've got too much property here and there for me to be on any side except the side of law and order. As for having you here in town, why, young man, I'm glad of it. We've needed an up-and-coming lawyer for a long time. Perhaps you're the very fellow for us! Block your game! No, sir, I wish you all the luck that I can give you, and when you're in doubt about anything, you come to me and talk things over. I might be able to give you some good advice!"

Now, as he said this, there was such a kindly light in his little gray eyes, set close under the shadow of his big nose, and such a smile wrinkled the beard which covered his fat cheeks, that David felt half of his suspicions drop away from him on the instant.

"Well, Mr. Shodress," said he, "I've an idea that everything you tell me may be entirely true. At the least, I'm willing to go on that basis!"

He gripped the hand of the other with all the force in his arm. It was like seizing a rock—such was the power in the hand of Alec Shodress.

"And as for advice," said David mildly, "I'm always open to it."

"Do you mean that, young man?"

"I do."

"Then let me start off with something that may do you a lot of good. The boys round this neck of the woods are a queer lot, and they don't like folks that ain't open and aboveboard. They have a particular dislike to that slim gent that you got along with you."

"You mean Deems?"

"That's what I mean. They say that he goes soft-footing around the town like he was a cat, or a spy, or something. And yet he don't seem a very nervy fellow, either. No, sir, he's got a big dog along with him to protect him if he was to get into trouble. But let me tell you, Apperley, that when trouble starts in this part of the world, it strikes like a thunderclap, and dogs ain't much use, no matter how loud they might bark!"

David smiled.

"Deems is not a bad fellow," he said patronizingly. "As a matter of fact, I have him here trying to make a man of him. And I think that I may succeed. But I can tell you right away that he's no spy of mine!"

A little later, very well pleased with this interview, he went back to his office, for which he had rented a little shack, on the door of which there now appeared the pleasant legend:

"David Apperley, attorney at law."

He had never had an office before. He had never unsheathed his knowledge of law and used it as an actual tool for the business of life. Now he regretted that he had not begun the work long before. For he could feel new mental muscles coming into play. His heart was lighter than it had ever been, even in the midst of a lion hunt.

First of all, he felt that he should send an immediate letter to his brother, advising him that Mr. Shodress was rather a rough diamond, but that in his heart of hearts he was really a very good chap, and that the mischief between the two of them had apparently been entirely caused by tale carriers. But upon second thought, he assured himself that it would be foolish to send such a letter. Not mere words were to be used upon stubborn Andrew, only the irresistible logic of facts!

So he was sunning himself in the thoughts of the future, when business suddenly came to the door of his office and stopped there.

Business came up in the form of seven galloping horses, upon whose backs were seven cowboys. One of those men had his arms tied together and secured to the pommel of his saddle. The others had their hands free and looked as though they were very capable of using the big-handled Colts which projected from holsters at saddle and hip.

One of these sun-bronzed fellows strode up to the door and stood in the opening.

"You're David Apperley?"

"Yes."

"I got something for you. Boys, bring him in."

They brought in the man whose hands were tied together.

"This is Bill Whaley. Got him red-handed stealing cows."

"Whaley? Is that the name?"

"Look here, Apperley," said the prisoner. "This here has gone far enough for a joke. I warn you about that. Just because I was trying out a brand-new cutting hoss, that I got, these here boys thought that I was running a bunch of cows——"

"Whaley!" snapped the leader of the band.

"Well?" snarled Whaley, who was a big man, with a large, crooked mouth that now pursed and puckered up on one side of his face.

"Whaley, tell Apperley that you're a liar, but that he ain't a fool!"

"I'm going to get you for this, Briggs!" declared Whaley savagely.

"You crooked hound," said Briggs with enthusiasm and force, "wasn't it poison to me to have to bring you up here where the law will find a chance of getting you free? But if there was fight in you, why didn't you offer to have it out with me when I first met up with you? You was afraid, Whaley. You showed yellow. And you'll show yellow again, if you ever get out of jail. I could eat a salad made out of a dozen swine like you!"

So said Mr. Briggs.

"One moment," put in Mr. Apperley. "I think that this man should be brought to the jail and taken care of, there. You will swear out the warrant and everything in due form—and which of you can stay here as witnesses?"

"I got to stay," said the leader, "and Johnson ought to stay, too, because he was the first one to sight that gent. He seen all of the early workings. Two eyewitnesses ought to be enough."

"I think so. Just start him for the jail."

"But after he's in the jail, who'll keep him in there?"

"The bars, I suppose."

"The bars, while the keys are in the hands of old Shodress' gang?"

"If that's the case," said Apperley, "then we'll watch the jail, and the man that's in it. Now take him over, if you please!"

He sat down to smoke a cigarette and think things over. But before five minutes was out, a large form bulked in his doorway. It was Shodress, shouting: "Look here, young feller. There's been a terrible mistake!"

"Hello! What mistake?"

"Why, man, they've arrested one of the best men on the range. Known him for years. Clean as a whistle and honest as steel. Bill Whaley. They've trumped up a charge against him, and they say that you're behind the charge, Apperley. I only have to say that I hope that you're not mixed up in any such business as that!"

David was rather glad, suddenly, that he had not hurried to send to his brother the letter in praise of Mr. Shodress. For the man was swelling with violence.

"What can I do?" he asked.

"Do? Why, you're your brother's representative. And you can have those fellows withdraw the charges!"

"As soon as the case comes into court I'll——"

"Hey, Apperley, are you one of those that always wants to go by every legal form? Don't you stand for any short-cuts?"

"None," said David quietly.

"Then, young man, you're going to get yourself into a great deal of trouble! You're not going to last long in Yeoville, I can tell you!"

"Then I'll finish soon." David smiled. "But my present conviction is that Whaley is guilty."

"Is that final?"

"It is."

"Then get yourself ready to leave this town—or you'll have your grip packed for you!"

CHAPTER XII.

AGENTS OF MURDER.

IT will be observed that the good nature of Mr. Shodress had disappeared completely and one could see nothing except the snarling of the wolf nature which lurked just behind the front door of his fat smiles. He was shaking with rage, and he fairly filled the door with his bulk.

"I've made men like you and smashed 'em!" he told David. "I've offered to give you a square deal and a fine start in this town. And you turn around and cut my throat!"

"I turn around," said David Apperley, "and ask you to remember that I never begged for your help. As for this fellow Whaley, I'm simply going to use the strictness of the law on him, and nothing else!"

"Law?" shouted Mr. Shodress. "The law of this town I've got in my pocket, and I'll show you that I mean what I say, before I'm through. Apperley, do you really think that you can stay here in Yeoville and stand up to me?"

It was very patent that young Apperley *did* think so, and with a vengeance. He merely smiled in the face of the big man.

"To begin with, to show you what I'm made of, I'm going to snuff out this young sneak that you got around the town, snooping into affairs that ain't got anything to do with him!"

He turned in the street and shook his fist back at David.

"The jail won't hold Whaley for a single day!" he yelled.

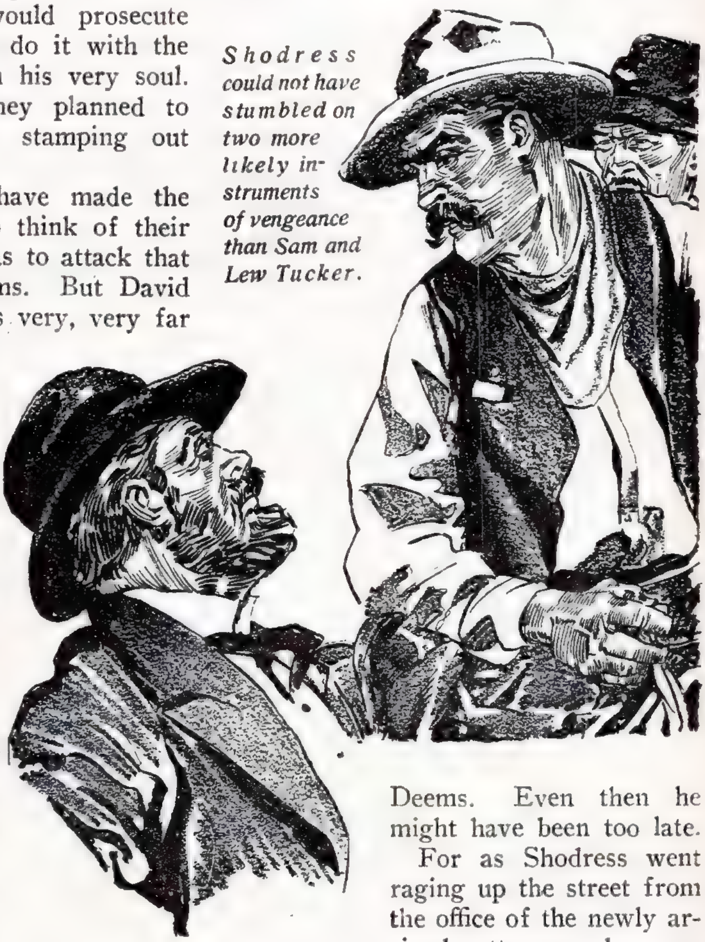
To this, David made no reply. He knew that this was a serious matter, and yet he could not help smiling. For Alexander Shodress was behaving like a child, and a spoiled child, at that. He had flown into a tantrum, and revealed his plans. What could be more foolish than that? Moreover, he had made the greatest mistake of all in threatening David. Because, in spite of numerous faults, David was neither a fool nor a craven. And all that was best and strongest in him rose up to meet this situation. Yes, he would prosecute Whaley, and he would do it with the last ounce of power in his very soul.

In the meantime, they planned to show their power by stamping out Single Jack Deems.

Perhaps it should have made the young lawyer smile, to think of their being so full of folly as to attack that poisonous fighter, Deems. But David did not smile. He was very, very far from smiling. No matter how formidable Single Jack might be considered in the cities of the East, David was convinced that here, in Yeoville, he was a fish out of water. He looked upon Single Jack with nothing but apprehension, as a burden to his progress, and a helpless weight, which must be cared for. So, every morning, when Deems came to report and asked: "What are the orders for to-day, Apperley?" David would simply answer: "Just keep yourself out of harm's way, that's all!"

So far, it seemed as though Deems had done it, but perhaps he had overdone that quiet part, and had been so very stealthy that he had given the impression of being a cowardly spy sneaking about the town.

So David locked his office and started out in haste to find his ward.



Shodress could not have stumbled on two more likely instruments of vengeance than Sam and Lew Tucker.

He was much, much too late. Indeed, had he known how swiftly events transpired in that town, and with what snakelike speed the hand of big Shodress could strike, he would have mounted his horse and started at a frantic gallop, shouting the name of Deems. Even then he might have been too late.

For as Shodress went raging up the street from the office of the newly arrived attorney, he saw two men ride by on cow ponies—two men who waved their hands to him in a sort of informal salute. Shodress ran into the street and called them.

"Hey, Sam and Lew, hey come here!"

They reined swiftly to him. They were two sun-thinned fellows, who shaved once a week, and that present week was approaching an end.

Mr. Shodress could not have stumbled upon two more likely instruments of his vengeance. Both Sam and Lew were graced with prison records, and though those records were long, they were not so long as they might have been. Twice, at least, the strong hand of Alec Shodress had intervened to rescue them from the grip of the law, and therefore he was a part owner of their very souls.

"Boys," he said, "I'm bothered with a little, sneaking rat that's spying into my affairs here in Yeoville and making life dangerous for all of us. Name of Deems."

"We know him!"

"D'you know any good of him?"

"Not a thing!"

"Boys, I wish he was dead!"

"All right, chief, we'll see that he is."

"Do you know where he is?"

"We seen him not five minutes ago back at the store."

"I hope you make it hard for me to find him. So long!"

"So long, Alec!"

They swung their horses around and cantered blithely up the street, and Shodress watched them go with a smile of gratified vanity. It pleased him to the core of his soul to have such winged messengers in his service. Men strong as thunderbolts, willing to fly to the ends of the earth in his service. Strong, keen, edged tools which he knew how to use so that they were not blunted, but ever rendered sharper for his work!

It did not occur to him that there was something brutal in ordering the murder of a man in this casual manner. It was necessary to strike a sharp blow in the face of Apperley, and the slaughter of this adherent would be enough to drive him out of the town, even though the nerves of an Apperley were apt to be most steady. To have Apperley himself killed—why, that was a different matter, and the sort of a thing that might cause a government investigation, with all of its attending evils. But for the murder of such a cringing fellow as young Deems—that could not be an affair of much importance!

Mr. Shodress went up the street again, his face shining with perspiration and pleasure, and a cigar stuffed into one corner of his fat mouth. After all, he was used to the details of such affairs as this!

In the meantime, the two brothers, Sam and Lew Tucker, swung down the street at a round gallop. It was long since they had been seriously employed, and not having been employed, they had begun to feel that they were forgotten. Their funds had been eaten very low. Their spirits had become depressed.

But now all was altered. To them, the killing of a man was hardly more than routine labor.

"You see," said Sam Tucker, "the old man was just saving us for something important."

"You were right," admitted the other brother. "I thought that the old fathead had plumb forgot us. But I never done nothing that pleased me more than wiping this sneaking coward of a Deems out of the way!"

"Nor me neither. I never liked his looks! A sneak and a rat! There he is! Lew, you edge up to him and begin it."

"Leave that to me!"

There were several verandas in the town of Yeoville, but none in more demand than the long stretch of shadow which ran up and down past the front windows of the general merchandise store. That was owned by Mr. Shodress, just as everything that was really worth while in Yeoville was owned by the same gentleman. There could hardly have been a better place to meet and idle. For, whereas, on the hotel veranda important matters and people often got together, still in front of the store something was constantly happening. People came in for supplies, and as they went out again, they lingered for a while in the shade to hear the latest news—not cold news read out of a paper, but rich and spicy news, flavored by all the tongues over which it had passed. News which could be heard and re-heard. News which, in the second or third telling, could be reenforced a little by one's own repeating. Each arrival from a different part of the range was sure to carry his own bit of treasure to the general feast of knowledge.

For other reasons, the front of the store was a favored place for congregation. On that deep and wide veranda, one could turn one's head and grace the eye with the prospect of good saddles, richly carved, and giving forth the fragrance of tanned leather; then there were chaps of all kinds; boots decorated with graceful, spoon-handled spurs; sombreros and felt hats; guns; fishing rods; cutlery; hardware such as gladdens the heart of the camper, and clothes worthy of any man's wearing. From the interior deeps of the store, moreover, one could enjoy the smell of roasted coffee, richest of perfumes, and the mingled spicery of dried apples, sides of bacon, and a hundred other necessaries which were luxuries also, on a range where pork and beans made up so great a portion of the regular ration of every cow-puncher.

It was in a corner of this porch that Single Jack now sat, between a great pair of saddles.

"Look at the sneak!" said Lew with a virtuous wrath. "Where he can hear everything, and where he ain't goin' to be noticed, much! Why it's a real pleasure to have to finish him off!"

"I'll do the job myself, without no help from you," said Sam.

"And get the price from the old man, all by yourself, too? No, I'll just take a little hand at the deal, old-timer, and split the reward with you."

They journeyed up the veranda, leaving their horses by the watering trough. They lingered along the way, speaking here and there to an acquaintance—because friends the Tuckers had none—and so they came at last in the vicinity of the chair in which Single Jack Deems was sitting, with his hands clasped in his lap—what long and slender fingers!—and with his head tilted back a little, and a faint, Oriental smile in his eyes and on his lips, as though he were brooding over distant things too terrible, or too trivial, to take the attention of other men.

Lew Tucker began it.

He made a blundering step and stumbled straight over the big dog which lay at the feet of Mr. Deems.

CHAPTER XIII.

HIS BACK AGAINST THE WALL.

NOW the side rip of the white fangs of Comanche cut just as deep as a heavy bowie knife, wielded by the hand of an expert, and the movement of his head was just as inescapable as the dart of a snake when it strikes without warning. So that one of the brothers Tucker was apt to be put out of action before the battle began had it not been that there was something else present which was just a shade faster than the lightning snap of the wolf dog. It was the hand of Single Jack.

It darted out and checked the danger. There was only a formidable clash of teeth as Mr. Tucker stumbled past, but that sound made him whirl about in real apprehension. He marked the snarl on the lips of the great brute, and he saw the green fire in its eyes, and the hand which was wound into its mane, restraining it.

"Curses on you and your dog!" exclaimed Mr. Tucker. "Why are you always in the way?"

Mr. Deems was never in a hurry in his speech. Usually he spoke just loud enough for people to hear, by straining their ears a little. You would have said that there was something wrong with the organs of his throat, that he was not able to raise a sufficient volume of sound. But on the other hand, he enunciated with such peculiar distinctness that even his whisper would carry a surprising distance. But like everything else about him, his voice was oddly relaxed. When he lifted his hand, it was as though a weight were attached to it, and when he raised his eyes, it was as though he were rousing himself from sleep.

Said he in his very gentle way: "I have been sitting here because I was sure that I would be in no one's way."

"You were sure, were you?" snarled Lew Tucker. "You were sure that you could set around and spy on everybody else in the town, hiding in the dark corners, like this. Do you think that the rest of us are fools?"

"Oh, no," said Single Jack gently. "I didn't think that, of course."

"By Jupiter!" cried Lew Tucker, "you admit that you have been spying, here!"

Now the noise of the raised voice of Mr. Tucker had rung up and down the veranda, and there was a sudden murmur of assent and sympathy.

"That sneak of a tenderfoot is going to get his!"

No one liked Mr. Deems in this new part of the world. His strange, dark, watchful eyes troubled them, and the odd silence of his step disturbed them, for they would find him among them without knowing exactly how he had approached them.

Now they were very glad, when they felt that punishment was about to descend upon the head of Deems. Not that they had anything concrete against him, but we always hate most that which is least known to us—unless we have picked it out for worship! Strange people are ridiculous and disgusting; so are strange gods. And never had the blunt and free-swinging West seen a man less like itself than was Single Jack Deems!

The two brothers could see at a glance that they had the matter entirely in their own hands. There would not be the slightest interruption from this obliging crowd. They would stand by and see summary execution done upon the stranger without so much as lifting a hand in his defense, and therefore Sam Tucker roared: "I'm going to have it out of him with my own hands. I'm going to tear it out of him. I'm going to make him tell me who it was that hired him to do his dirty work in Yeoville!"

He reached out a strong right hand and fastened his grip upon the neck of Deems.

I mean to say that he reached out, *intending* to fasten his grip upon the neck of Single Jack, but somehow he missed, as Mr. Deems glided from his chair and said mildly:

"I hope that there will be no trouble, sir. I don't want to make any trouble for anybody!"

"It ain't a trouble. It's a pleasure," snarled Lew Tucker, closing in from the other side.

There was a sudden, throat-rending snarl from the wolf dog, who plainly apprehended what these maneuvers on the part of the two men might mean. He rose, bristling, his reddened eyes turning up to his master for the slightest signal.

"Kill the brute!" cried Lew Tucker, springing back from the danger. "Shoot that wolf dog. It'll have its teeth in one or both of us, in another minute!"

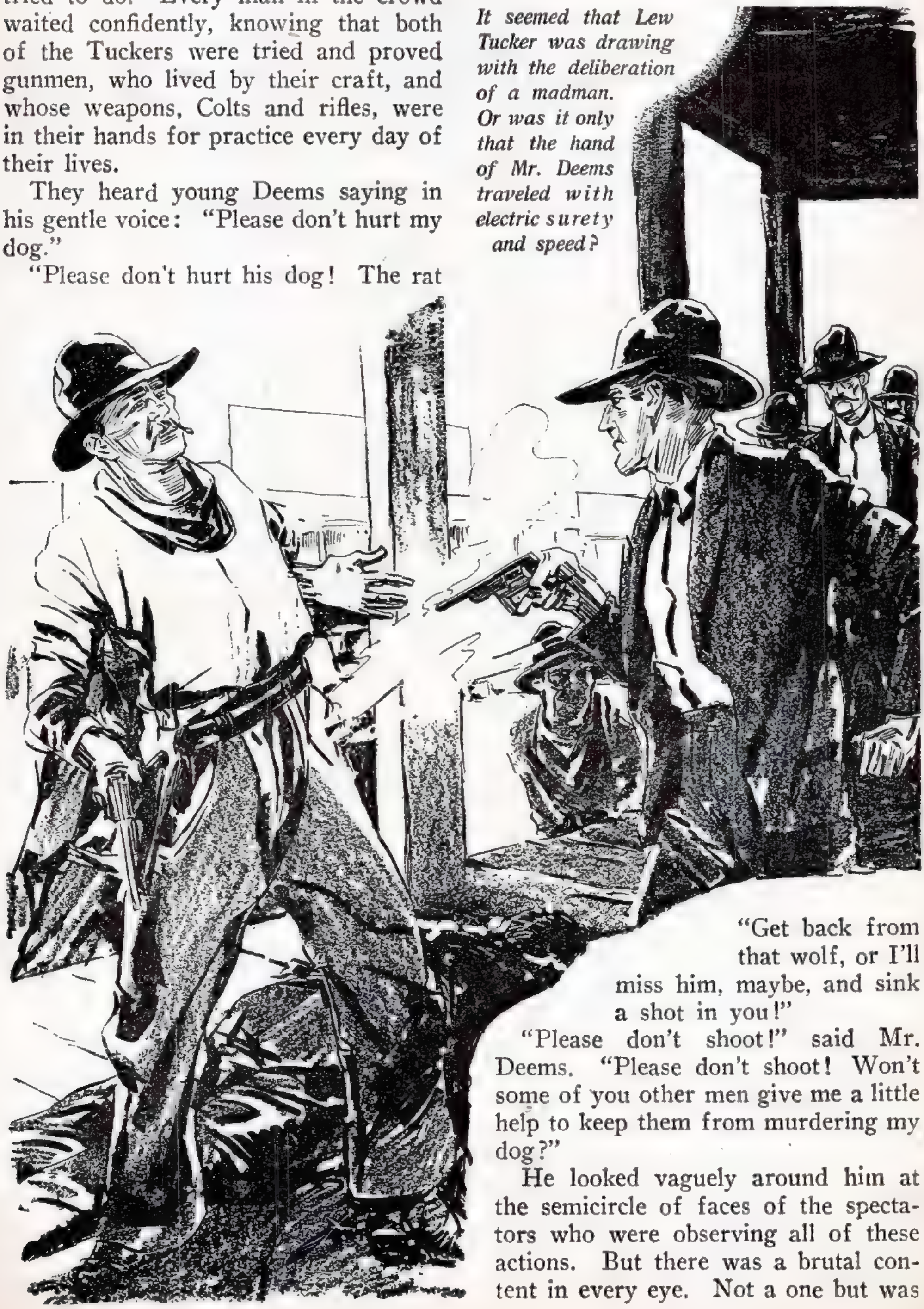
"I'll finish it!" said Mr. Sam Tucker, and laid his hand upon the butt of his Colt.

But now we must go slowly, because we have arrived at the moment when Mr. Deems first dawned like a new star upon the mind and the heart of the free West. It must be noted that here was Deems with his back against the wall, and the wolf dog crowded against his legs, and twenty pairs of eyes not far away to note everything that he did, or tried to do. Every man in the crowd waited confidently, knowing that both of the Tuckers were tried and proved gunmen, who lived by their craft, and whose weapons, Colts and rifles, were in their hands for practice every day of their lives.

They heard young Deems saying in his gentle voice: "Please don't hurt my dog."

"Please don't hurt his dog! The rat won't even fight for his dog. D'you see that?"

Then came the roar of Sam Tucker:



It seemed that Lew Tucker was drawing with the deliberation of a madman. Or was it only that the hand of Mr. Deems traveled with electric surety and speed?

"Get back from that wolf, or I'll miss him, maybe, and sink a shot in you!"

"Please don't shoot!" said Mr. Deems. "Please don't shoot! Won't some of you other men give me a little help to keep them from murdering my dog?"

He looked vaguely around him at the semicircle of faces of the spectators who were observing all of these actions. But there was a brutal content in every eye. Not a one but was pleased to witness this little sample of harshness. Justice, they called it. It had the making of a story that would be worth repeating.

"Stand back, you fool!" shouted Sam Tucker. "I warn you for the last time!"

His fingers tightened on the butt of his Colt.

"I've asked you fellows to help me," sighed Single Jack. "But you don't seem to want to!"

A roar of brutal laughter answered that almost feminine appeal.

"And so," they heard the soft voice of Single Jack continue, "I'm afraid that I shall have to shoot them both! But you be my witnesses that I have tried to avoid all trouble!"

They gaped at him in a sort of horror. There was no sign of any gun carried by this stranger. Could it be that the poor fellow was a half-wit? No, his face seemed intelligent enough. If one looked a little more closely at it, one could see that it had lost a bit of its usual pallor, and there was almost a smile upon the lips, and in the dark, dead eyes, a spark had at last been blown up.

So he meant what he said!

"Look out, Lew!" called Sam Tucker in mockery. "You'll be getting yourself killed, in a minute. This here rat is going to show his teeth. All right! Here goes the dog—you watch the man!"

He snatched out his Colt to fan it from the hip, intending to send a liberal spray of lead in the direction of his opponents—the first bullet at the dog, and then if his next shots flew a little wild, flew heart-high, say, and reached the man, why who could really blame him? And would it not appear in any court before which he might appear, that he had merely defended himself when attacked by a wild brute of a wolf dog? And that an accidental shot which he greatly regretted——

So flew the thoughts of Mr. Sam Tucker, a little faster than his gun, but not much. But just as his thumb pressed the hammer of his gun, a miracle happened.

For Mr. Deems had made a sudden gesture toward the left armpit of his coat, and when his right hand came away there was a gleam of steel, something to be guessed at rather than seen, until it blossomed into a flash of fire, a spout of smoke, and the plainly heard impact of a large caliber bullet as it struck the body of Sam Tucker and knocked him down.

Lew Tucker had not waited to see more than the first flash of steel in the hand of the stranger before he himself made his draw, and he was admittedly a better and a faster fighter than his brother, and yet Lew Tucker did not seem to be moving rapidly. It seemed that he was reaching most leisurely for his weapon. It seemed that he was drawing and holding it at the hip with the deliberation of a madman. Or was it only because the hand of Mr. Deems was no longer moving as though weighted, but traveling with electric surety and speed?

As the Colt came to the level at the hip of Lew Tucker, a second shot from the gun in the hand of Deems struck Lew on the left thigh and ripped its way through both his legs, so that he pitched forward upon his face and discharged his weapon into the boards of the veranda floor as he fell.

Then over the two writhing, groaning, stricken men leaned Single Jack, saying in a voice of pleading eagerness: "I hope that you gentlemen will all be witnesses for me, that I didn't want to do it! And you'll agree with me that I didn't hunt for the trouble. And won't you please notice, also, that I haven't killed either of them? The first one is just through the center of the right shoulder, so that he wouldn't have the use of his gun hand, you see, and the second one through the upper legs, just in front of the thigh bones—I do hope that the bones were not broken."

He fell to work with a singular dexterity, using a knife to open the clothes above the wounds of the two fallen men, and examining their hurts.

The doctor came at that moment, and Single Jack said to him gently:

"There's no need for you to worry. They'll both just need a cleansing of the wounds with a good antiseptic. And then a little rest. I'm so sorry that it happened!"

The doctor did not answer him, because he thought the man was jesting. And no one else answered him, as they saw him retreat, solemnly, from the veranda, with the slinking wolf dog at his heels. They had no breath, indeed, for speech!

CHAPTER XIV.

TOO MUCH CONFIDENCE.

STRAIGHT down the street went Single Jack Deems and found David coming hastily up toward him.

"I thought I heard guns. Was some one practicing?" asked David.

Mr. Deems seemed very much perturbed, and he answered gravely that he trusted that he had not made any undue trouble for David Apperley.

"Trouble? Trouble?" asked David. "What do you mean?"

"Two of them backed me into a corner," said Deems, "and they were going to shoot Comanche. I had to do something!"

"And you ran away, I suppose?" suggested David.

Which shows how far Single Jack had fallen in the esteem of the young lawyer.

"I came away as soon as I could," said Single Jack seriously. "But before I could leave, I had to shoot them, both."

He added, while David stared: "Not fatally. But just one through the shoulder and the other through the legs. It was that or have bullets in Comanche and me!"

He remained looking earnestly into the face of David, and then said: "You'll tell your brother that I didn't hunt for the trouble?"

"Yes," said David, "I'll tell him that."

But he could not find any word of comment. He chiefly wondered, now that he had time to think of it, that the town should have remained so quiet, immediately following a double shooting.

He could see, now, that he had most arrogantly and stupidly misjudged this slayer of men. The dark-eyed, slender youth continued:

"You'll be leaving town, now, I suppose, Apperley?"

"Leaving town? Why?"

"Because now it'll be war to the finish. They'll never stop until they've had a chance to sink some bullets into me—and you! And they're more apt to have a chance to shoot you than to shoot me!"

"Leave town? Let myself be bluffed out just after I've opened my office? I'm not a coward, Deems! I hope to prove that I'm not a coward! No, I'm going to stay here and prosecute the case against Whaley!"

It seemed to young David Apperley that his companion had a hundred words hanging upon the tip of his tongue, but he crowded them all back as though seeing that they would be of no use. And, in fact, if there had been an attempt to persuade David to leave Yeoville, it would have been totally futile.

David went on through the town to get to the little courthouse and open the proceedings against Whaley formally. And before he had finished, he had fresh business on his hands, for the men of his brother, combing the range carefully to fill the hands of the lawyer in Yeoville, had found another rustler caught red-handed in the act. They carried him to the town among the hills. It was Steve Grange, still in his teens, lean and strong as a young lion, with a bandage tied around his head. A glancing shot had knocked him out of his saddle. Otherwise, every one said, he would never have been taken alive.

David Apperley saw the new prisoner and rubbed his hands. Then, going down the street, he encountered Charley Johnson and Les Briggs.

"I'm going to make cattle rustling the most unpopular sport on this range!" said he.

"Go to it!" said they. "We're behind you. Though I don't suppose we count much, now."

"Why not?"

"Now that you got a gent like that Deems around you! You've kept him under cover pretty well, though, we got to admit!"

"He seems to have made a great impression even on the ruffians in this town," said David, who was not quite sure.

Les Briggs turned his quid of chewing tobacco in his mouth and then spat accurately at a near-by stump of a tree.

"I talked to old Porky Smith. Porky has seen pretty near everything in the way of fighting that is worth seeing, and he says that there was never nothing like it. Not for speed and for accuracy and for style, y'understand? You could imagine a gent with speed and luck, and everything, able to drop even two gun fighters like the Tucker boys. But you couldn't imagine *placing* the shots, and being able to call them, both before and afterwards! You got something valuable in Deems. Do they call him Single Jack because he just uses one gun at a time?"

To these remarks David could not return any answer, but that night he had occasion to write to his brother:

Single Jack has been cornered by two of the bullies of Shodress, who is trying to drive us out of town. I think that he wanted to kill Deems, so that the example would frighten me away from Yeoville. But Deems shot down both the would-be assassins, and, in so doing, it seems that he has stunned even a place as rough as this Yeoville. The people look upon him as a prodigy. They have no word or way for explaining his speed and his skill. In this single fracas, he has made Single Jack a byword.

The fellow is not the least changed. He goes about as softly, and as much like a cat as ever. But I have changed my mind about him. It seems, Andy, that he's quite devoted to me. At least, now that the shooting has brought a good deal of active peril about the heads of both of us, Single Jack is never far from me. If I walk down the street, I can be sure that he is an unobtrusive shadow, lingering behind me. A dozen times I have seen these gun fighters finger their guns greedily as I go by. But they dare not draw, because they know that Single Jack is near me. So that the man you sent to have me save, Andy, is really saving me ten times a day. I have no doubt that Shodress has placed a very high price upon my head. His men are anxious to claim the reward, but at the same time they don't want to walk into the very intelligent gun of Mr. Deems—and I don't blame them. In the cool of every morning, for one hour, Single Jack does his practicing in the back yard behind my office, and I've sneaked out and watched him at his work twice. It isn't like marksmanship. It's like an uncanny will power at work. As though he were simply *wishing* things to happen—and they occur. I can't tell you things that he does in much detail. He always works in the dimness of the dawn, as though he wants to test his skill to the utmost by giving himself difficult light. But I can give you a sample of the things he accomplishes. I have seen him throw small pebbles into the air with one hand and shoot them to pieces as they fly. And he has a little game of jackstones, as you might call it. He takes a rubber ball in his left hand and starts it bouncing. On the ground before him lies a set of six small stones, and a Colt. He bounces the ball. While it is in the air and on the recoil, he snatches up a pebble and flicks it into the air and flips up the revolver's muzzle and fires. By this time the ball has struck the earth again, and it seems that he must have finished the tossing of the pebble and the shooting as the ball recoils the second time, or else it is a point against him. If all goes well, he continues this queer game, bouncing the ball, from hand to hand, and firing with alternate hands, until he has struck the six pebbles with the six bullets. You can see that this is a fiendishly difficult task. I have only seen him work out the whole affair twice, I think. Usually something goes wrong. He fails to catch the ball, or else he misses one of the pebbles. And instead of being elated by the wonderful skill which he shows, he always appears downcast. But having seen what his practice is like, I tell you, Andy, that I would freely back him against any three men in a stand-up gun fight. He is extremely modest, and never refers to what he has done in the past or what he expects to do in the future. I have repeatedly begged him to do some target shooting that I could watch in open daylight, but he always finds some excuse.

I have just had a singular example of his devotion. I had to leave my room, where I had been sitting up, writing this letter quite late at night, and, as I opened the door, I saw a shadow stretched across the hall. The green-eyed devil Comanche stood up and glared at me, and there was his master just sitting up and throwing off the blanket which had covered him. He told me it had been too hot to sleep in a stuffy bedroom on a bed. I said nothing, but I understood. He was guarding me through the middle of the night by lying across the hall in front of my door, his devil dog beside him!

This touches me a great deal, and I think it will touch you more, because from the first you saw something in this fellow, and I was so stupid as to think him a thoroughly bad case!

He has overwhelmed the whole town and all of its ruffians with his bravery and his peculiar gentle, unassuming, but thoroughly terrible manner. There is a sort of inhuman, feline dreadfulness about his step, his eyes, and his soft, drawling, purring voice.

In the meantime, the case gets on against Whaley. I have the jury selected, and I don't think, though most of them are confessed Shodress men, that they can possibly turn in any but a verdict of guilty. The case is as plain as can be, and I intend to drive it home as hard as I can.

At the same time, I am working matters up against young Steve Grange. He is younger than Whaley, but I think that he is infinitely the more important prize. The people in this town appear to respect him as though he were a much older and wiser man. He is an absolute dare-devil. His record is a very wild one, and I think that I shall be able to lodge him in the penitentiary for a number of years.

You will see that there is plenty of excitement up here. I like it. Without young Single Jack, I could not live for a single hour, I presume. With him, I think that I can get through any difficulty.

So wrote David Apperley in the small hours of the morning, and then went to the window to watch the waning of the stars. He was very contented with himself and with all that had passed in the last few days. He was beginning to lead a real life.

Of course he had no prescience which enabled him to see that he was momentarily rushing into more and more terrible dangers. He was building up a fatal self-confidence. Well would it have been for him if he had scrupulously trusted to the guardianship of Single Jack. But his self-confidence was his undoing—that and a girl!

CHAPTER XV.

ENTER THE GIRL.

SHE was the lovely, red-haired sister of Steven Grange.

But before we go back to her, we have to push ahead with other events, though they seem of no importance compared with Hester Grange.

She would never have been called into the affair, perhaps, had it not been for the fine work which David performed against Whaley. That gentleman was defended by a capable lawyer hired by the money of Shodress. And Alexander Shodress and his cigars were always in the courtroom, giving countenance to the defendant, and scowling bitterly at the prosecuting attorney. But even such influence could not absolutely down the facts in the case. Those facts were attested by competent eyewitnesses, and the final speech of David was really a little masterpiece, as he sketched in the evils of cattle rustling, and the future desolation of the range if the practice continued, pointing out that already even great owners of many herds of thousands could barely stand the yearly losses, whereas the small owners were wiped out root and branch by a single raid!

At any rate, the verdict was guilty, and the judge, scowling at the floor, gave the minimum sentence of three years. He was a perfectly good Shodress man, that judge, and he had made his final summing-up as partial as any summing up could be. But he had to pronounce the sentence, and Whaley was packed away to serve a three-years' sentence.

It was the first great victory for young David. He had worked for it like a beaver and a hero, and he smiled with a calm triumph that promised more trouble for evildoers in that part of the world.

It was not the rule for that court to turn in convictions. It was distinctly not the rule. It appeared that even fellows as corrupt as those jurors had a certain honor, and they were heard to say with many oaths, as they left the courtroom: "Facts is facts, and they got to be listened to! What is the world coming to, otherwise?"

What, indeed?

Shodress, sitting by the window, allowed the cigar to droop down from his soft-lipped, pursy mouth, while his fat face sagged, and a grayness overspread it. He was seeing signs of the coming of the end. His empire of graft and treachery and crookedness, supported by brutality and money, was threatened with its end and he turned blazing eyes toward the young lawyer who was striking so valiantly for the right.

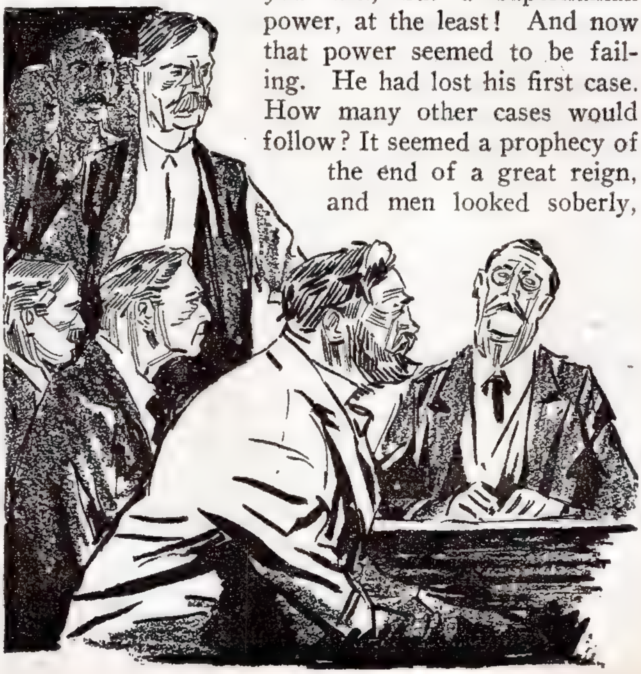
Other eyes marked that glance, and they understood it. Twenty guns were ready, but in the shadows of a corner, behind the lawyer, there was always seated a slender, boyish figure who watched all that happened with singular, dark, lack-luster, feline eyes. And as they looked at Single Jack, and at his slender, bony hands, always moving slowly, as though bearing a weight of drowsiness, their own guns were forgotten, and they looked suddenly down to the floor again.

So the crowd left the courtroom, and in the ears of many the words of Whaley were ringing, the words which he had uttered when the judge asked him if he had anything to say before sentence was pronounced.

"I got this to say: There's some think that money will buy anything. But what's the price of living behind bars?"

He had turned and glared openly at Shodress.

Yes, it might be the beginning of the end. Every one felt it. They had felt that Shodress was a sort of invincible archangel—an archangel of darkness, if you will, but a superhuman power, at the least! And now that power seemed to be failing. He had lost his first case. How many other cases would follow? It seemed a prophecy of the end of a great reign, and men looked soberly,



one to the other, wondering what would happen next.

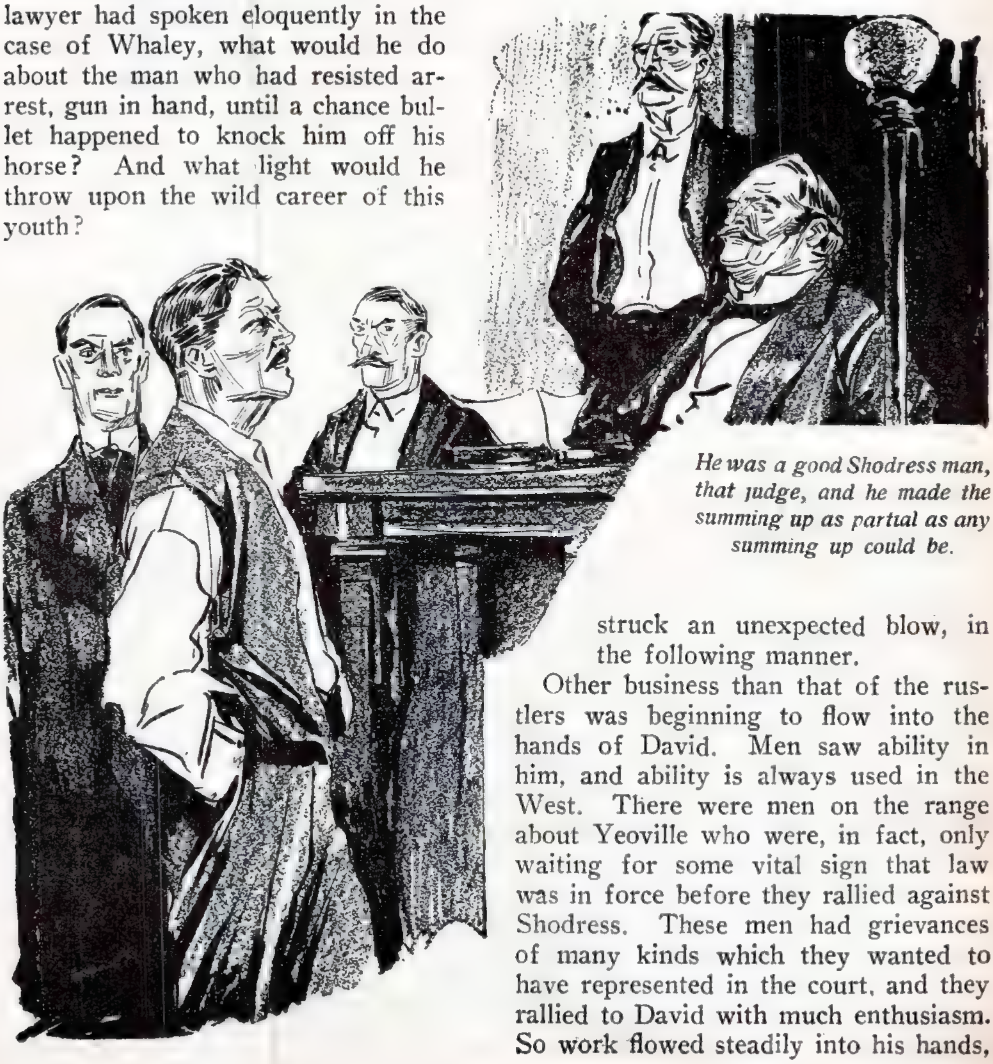
All of this is directly important not so much because it shows the ability mingled with courage which David Apperley had exhibited, or because it was the first trenchant blow delivered at the great Shodress, or because it sent a rascal to the penitentiary for the three years, but really because it had a vital bearing upon the next case which was coming up.

That was the case of Steve Grange. If Whaley was manifestly guilty, was not Steve doubly so? And if the lawyer had spoken eloquently in the case of Whaley, what would he do about the man who had resisted arrest, gun in hand, until a chance bullet happened to knock him off his horse? And what light would he throw upon the wild career of this youth?

No, Steve Grange was undoubtedly doomed before the trial, and there was all likelihood that the sentence would be nearer the maximum than the minimum, because there were open rumors of a breach between the judge and Shodress. The judge had said that his conscience had already been passed through enough fire. He was beginning to want to breathe a fresher air!

All of this portended much. Men walked scowling through the streets of Yeoville, uncertain what to do next.

Then the Grange-Shodress forces struck an unexpected blow, in the following manner.



He was a good Shodress man, that judge, and he made the summing up as partial as any summing up could be.

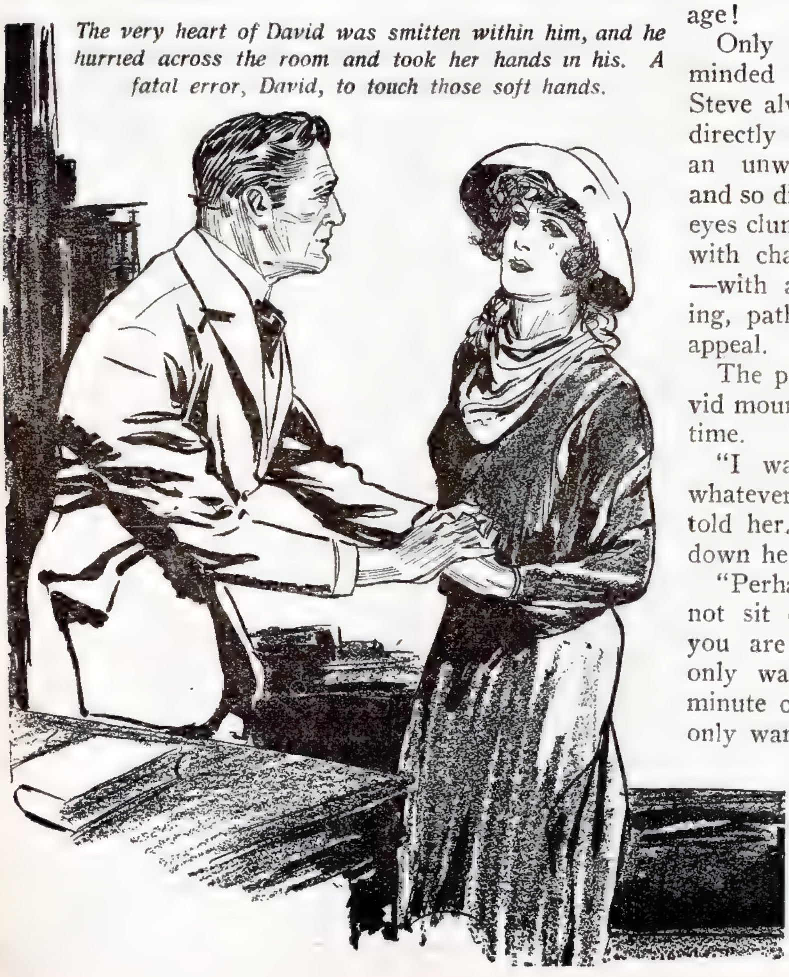
Other business than that of the rustlers was beginning to flow into the hands of David. Men saw ability in him, and ability is always used in the West. There were men on the range about Yeoville who were, in fact, only waiting for some vital sign that law was in force before they rallied against Shodress. These men had grievances of many kinds which they wanted to have represented in the court, and they rallied to David with much enthusiasm. So work flowed steadily into his hands, and he began to go down to his office early in the mornings.

So it happened that, on this morning, he had barely opened his office and taken his place behind his desk, when he was called upon by what seemed to him the loveliest woman in the entire world. She was dressed most unpretentiously, like any girl from the range, but she was one who needed no adornment. When she stood before David, he found himself setting his teeth to keep his heart from fluttering, and all the time that she was talking, the beauty of the coiled masses of that red hair, and the wonderful blue of her eyes unsettled poor David and made him much at outs with himself.

She said: "I am the sister of Stephen Grange. Will you let me talk to you about him?"

"Of course!" said David. He looked at her with a sinking heart. She was the sister of Steve Grange!

But Heaven alone could tell wherein the relationship appeared. For Steve was like a young lion, and this girl with her alluring, rather crooked smile, and the dimple that appeared and disappeared in one cheek was a delicate creature. Besides, Steve Grange was a youth of an iron nerve, and this girl was very badly frightened. See, where her soft hands were clasped together, how the flesh whitened with the pressure as she strove to keep up her courage!



The very heart of David was smitten within him, and he hurried across the room and took her hands in his. A fatal error, David, to touch those soft hands.

Only one thing reminded him of Steve. Steve always looked one directly in the eye with an unwavering glance, and so did this girl. Her eyes clung to his, but not with challenge or force —with a sort of clinging, pathetic, frightened appeal.

The pulse rate of David mounted by tens at a time.

"I want you to say whatever you wish," he told her. "Will you sit down here?"

"Perhaps I had better not sit down. I know you are very busy. I only want to take one minute of your time. I only want to beg you to have mercy on poor Steve, because——"

Tears flooded into her eyes. Still she did not look down to the floor, but studied him, as though she feared lest at any moment a flash of pity might appear in his eyes and she remain in ignorance of it.

"My dear Miss Grange," said he. "My dear Miss Grange, suppose that we look at it in this manner—that I am committed by my honor to work in the cause of justice——"

Her lips trembled, but she did not speak; she only waited. He felt that he was striking a helpless creature, and the flesh of David crawled with horror and strong self-contempt.

"And then again, suppose you admit that Steve is a misguided fellow. Will you admit that?" he asked her.

"We know that poor, dear Steve has done wrong—very great wrong. There isn't any excuse!"

"Very well, with a strong nature like Steve's, the best cure is a strong hand, usually. He's offended the law. Let him learn that no matter how strong he may be, the law is a great deal stronger. That lesson of respect may make the rest of his life a useful one, and while the years in prison may seem long to one who looks forward to them, they are sure to appear short, when he looks back."

She caught her breath. She said faintly: "Then I cannot do anything at all?"

She drew back toward the door, but still with those tearful eyes fixed upon him.

The very heart of David was smitten within him, and he hurried across to her and took her hands in his. A fatal error, David, to touch those hands, so soft, though not half so soft as they look. And to come within range of the fragrance which hangs in her hair. Ah, foolish, foolish David! It mounts through your brain faster than incense ever wafted from this earth of sorrow to the blessed abodes of the gods.

"What *can* do?" said he.

"I don't know! I don't know!" she said, and, though she stood so close, her glance never once wavered from his; he could see the open, tear-brightened blueness of her eyes, so like the eyes of a child. "Only, it's my fault, you see," she added.

"Come, come! Your fault?"

"When father died, he left Steve to mother, and when mother died, she left him to me, because we all knew that he needed to be taken care of. If I'd made the home brighter and gayer, then he wouldn't have been tempted to go out hunting such terrible adventures——"

"But why in the name of Heaven should he have been left in your care?"

"Of, of course that was right, because I'm his older sister, you know! Oh, there was nothing else for mother to do!"

Older sister? Older baby.

"I'll tell you this," said David. "I'll —I'll see what I can do—and let you know—er——"

"If you will let me dare to hope—oh, God bless you! Because if Steve were put in prison, he would rage like a wild creature. He would break out. Then even murder would be nothing to him. Oh, I know him so well! He is so terribly strong, and so young——"

She to talk of youth with pity! She!

"Poor child! Poor child!" murmured David, a lump in his throat.

Suddenly she was smiling at him sympathetically through her tears.

"Yes, that is all he is, isn't it? Oh, thank you for understanding!"

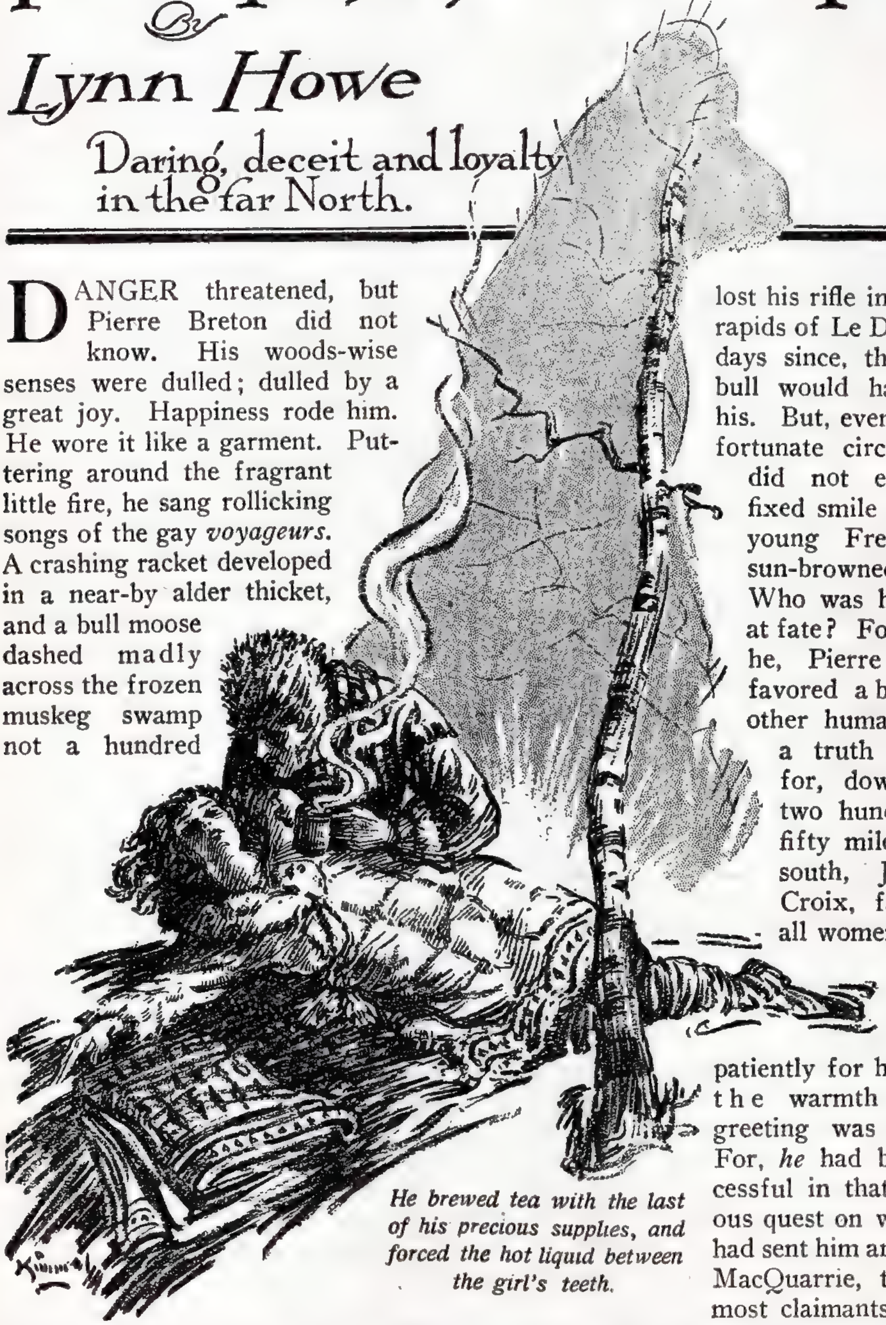
To be continued in the next issue of FAR WEST ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE.

False Trophy of the Trail

By

Lynn Howe

Daring, deceit and loyalty in the far North.



He brewed tea with the last of his precious supplies, and forced the hot liquid between the girl's teeth.

DANGER threatened, but Pierre Breton did not know. His woods-wise senses were dulled; dulled by a great joy. Happiness rode him. He wore it like a garment. Puttering around the fragrant little fire, he sang rollicking songs of the gay *voyageurs*. A crashing racket developed in a near-by alder thicket, and a bull moose dashed madly across the frozen muskeg swamp not a hundred yards away. A perfect target. Pierre Breton's food was low, and he was very hungry; if he had not carelessly lost his rifle in the mad rapids of Le Diable two days since, this moose bull would have been his. But, even this unfortunate circumstance did not erase the fixed smile from the young Frenchman's sun-browned face. Who was he to rail at fate? For was not he, Pierre Breton, favored above all other humans? Of a truth he was, for, down there, two hundred and fifty miles to the south, Julie La Croix, fairest of all women, waited patiently for him. And the warmth of her greeting was assured. For, *he* had been successful in that dangerous quest on which she had sent him and Angus MacQuarrie, the foremost claimants for her hand. He had traveled four hundred miles to the shore of the arctic sea, and he was returning with what he had gone for. Warmly wrapped in his best blanket inside the little lean-to, was a ten-weeks-old Ungava husky bitch, which evil-tempered little ball of fur had all but cost him his life at the hands of the unfriendly Innuits. Incidentally, it had cost the savings representing a year's hard work. It was this dog which Julie La Croix had desired. This snow-white puppy would, in the years to come, mother a team of the finest sled dogs in all Canada. Yes, he, Pierre Breton, was the lucky one. Always was he lucky. Why then should he worry over the loss of his rifle, and the shortage of food?

One other thing Pierre Breton would have noticed had not his great happiness rendered him a witless thing, had it not obscured the meanings of the most palpable signs, which, ordinarily, would have been as clear to his understanding eyes as the words on a printed page: he was downwind from that moose! The near-sighted beast could not have seen him. What then could have alarmed this king of the wilderness? No other animal, certainly. Only the scent of man could have brought about that uncautious flight. But Pierre Breton did not think. His wits were asleep on a couch of happiness.

Before satisfying his own ravenous hunger to the slight extent permitted by his meager stock of food, he first saw to the welfare of Lizette, the wolfish little stranger from the far North. He spent several minutes in the lean-to, then came out, smiling, and caressing a bloody finger which the puppy had nipped. The smile vanished abruptly as strong hands gripped him and threw him solidly to the ground. Indians! There were dozens of them, it seemed, short, squat, thick-muscled men. He fought silently, furiously, but they were prepared; they took no chances. The while three of them held his legs, several others anchored his arms. Still others stood about, stolidly alert. They were all armed, some with rifles, some with bone-headed spears. But they made no attempt to use these weapons. These were the Innuits from whom he had purchased the dog. Evidently they had regretted parting with the animal; they had come to take it back. And, lying there, crushed to the ground by the weight of many bodies, Pierre Breton's big body tensed with a great rage. To get that dog they would have to kill him. Unarmed though he was, he would show them, these fat-bodied savages, how a son of France made the great fight. He lay still, breathing slowly and deeply, gathering strength for that supreme effort.

But some inchoate impulse made him hesitate. He waited and watched. They had not touched the dog, as yet. His little camp, close hidden in an alder clump, was being thoroughly ransacked. If not the dog, what were they searching for? They talked among themselves, but he did not understand their guttural language. All seemed very weary, as though they had traveled fast for a considerable distance. He had been on the way three days; evidently they had not started until much later, and had just come upon him. They had not been following him, of this he was certain. Finally, Amlik, whom he recognized as the head man of the village, called a throaty command. As one man, the half dozen young warriors who had been holding him, sprang away.

Breton jumped to his feet, then paused, uncertain whether or not to renew the fight. They had not taken the dog. They had not harmed him. Why then should he court certain death?

His anger cooled quickly, and, before the last of the fur-clad figures had disappeared in the thicketed swamp, a suspicion of a smile had already appeared on his dark face. He shrugged.

"The joke, maybe, who can tell?"

But he knew this was not the answer. Calculating humor was unknown to these sullen savages. They had searched his camp for a definite purpose. What —what—had they expected to find? He pondered futilely. But not for long. Prolonged mental effort was not one of Pierre Breton's strong points. The Indians had attacked him; they had done no harm. Voilà! The affair was ended.

Within a brace of minutes the smile had returned permanently to his handsome face, and the song to his lips. He helped himself to a small portion of bannock, a sour-dough biscuit, and a pannikin of weak tea brewed from grounds saved from the previous day. Just as he squatted before the smoky little fire preparatory to enjoying the scant repast, the quick movement of some living thing caught his eyes. At first he thought it was a shadow, cast by the flickering flames. Then he saw it. A woman. An Indian woman.

For a long minute she stood, motionless, at the thicket edge. Then she came toward him, sidling slowly, tentatively, nearer and nearer. A girl, young and pretty. She avoided his questioning gaze. In her big brown eyes, there was a certain doubtful, timorous quality, like a dog that knows not whether to expect a blow or a caress. She crouched by the fire, and held red hands timidly toward the warmth. Her eyes rested hungrily on the food in Breton's hand. The young Frenchman slowly moistened his dry lips. He knew this girl. Eetwa, her name was, daughter of Amlik. For her, Amlik and his warriors had searched his camp. He was sure of it. She had run away. Why had she run away? To join him, Pierre Breton, perhaps. It looked that way. Perhaps she loved him. He had given her no encouragement. Back there in the Indian village, he had spoken no more than a dozen words to her. But the mating instincts of these simple children of the wilderness were hampered by none of the gentle hypocrisies of civilization, even civilization as he knew it. If she loved him, she would go with him. Nothing short of death could tear her from that vital urge. Well he knew. He attempted to shrug away the mass of complications that such a situation would surely cause. Still, he might be wrong. Perhaps her father had beaten her, and she had gone away on that account. Had she come upon his camp by chance? Certain it was that she had left hastily. She carried not so much as a blanket. Her clothes were torn. A red toe peeped through a worn moccasin. And she was hungry.

The girl watched him through slitted eyes as he took half of the food allotted for his meager supper and passed it to her across the little fire. She took it, smiling. But Pierre Breton did not smile.

"You go far?" he asked. He spoke in English. None of her tribe understood French, he knew. There had been an American missionary in their village, and from him they had all gathered a smattering of English.

She did not reply at once, devoting her every attention to the food, until the last crumb was gone.

Then she said: "I go wit' you."

Pierre Breton was not surprised, and yet his heart sank. What would people say? The critical little settlement at Nordden House would dub him "squaw man." And Julie? Could she be made to understand? For he could not get rid of this girl, now. He had shared his food with her, in the first place; that, in itself, constituted tacit acceptance of her companionship. Nevertheless, he shook his head emphatically.

"No, you mus' go back, Eetwa. For witness, there ees no food. An' I make the long traverse. Soon weel come the beeg snow. We weel starve."

"I go—wit' you," she repeated stolidly.

Breton came angrily to his feet. What to do? He couldn't leave the girl on the trail to starve. He might follow on after old Amlik, and tell him. But no, the Indians would probably kill her; at the least, she would be ostracized, and her life rendered miserable. No, there was nothing he could do, but let her stay, and trust to his lucky star to guide him through the complications which would inevitably ensue.

Pierre Breton was not one to be downcast for long. With his thoughts centered on the fair-haired Julie at far Nordden House, the unbroken wilderness trail with its attendant hardships, the shortage of food, and the problem of Eetwa, the Indian girl, all became matters of little moment compared with the heart-warming anticipation of that meeting with his loved one.

He made good time. Much better than if he had been alone. Eetwa assumed more than her share of the work. Breton studiously avoided her; for days no word passed between them. Each night she slept in the open before the fire, reluctantly making use of one of his spare blankets. Each morning she was awake long before him; and, while he slept, she prepared breakfast. She cut wood, tended the fire, watched over Lizette with motherlike solicitude, and, in a hundred ways, rendered herself useful. She became thin and pale, but there was a great happiness in her eyes that sent a pang to Breton's heart every time he saw. She was like a faithful dog, only, the simple caresses with which he might have rewarded a dog for its loyalty, he could not bestow on this girl. Not that she was unattractive, but she was an Indian, and, too, in the heart of Pierre Breton there dwelt but the single, golden image—Julie La Croix.

At the end of a week, even Pierre Breton's great optimism found cause to falter. He had been obliged to swerve from the more direct route through the hills because of the deep snows which already filled the upper mountain valleys. It was still two hundred miles to Nordden House. The cabin of André Chatain, where he had planned on replenishing his supplies, was a hundred miles distant, and his food was almost gone. He was beginning to notice the lack of adequate nourishment. By noon of each day, he was tired. At each meal, he divided the food equally with the girl. More and more reluctantly he did this. By what law of man, or God, was he compelled to share his badly needed food with this foolish Indian girl? It was her fault. Without her, he could have made André's cabin easily. Now, too, she lagged on the trail. Oftentimes, he was obliged to help her over particularly rough passages. He came to hate the patient, plodding creature with a great hate.

The eighth day dawned dull and cold. A vast, oppressive stillness rendered the gray-white wilderness a dread, implacable thing. Black clouds, low-hanging, rolled swiftly across the leaden sky. A biting wind came out of the north. Snow! The first big snow of the year was long past due. Pierre Breton pushed on with feverish haste. Eetwa followed, far in the rear. She was much slower than usual, this day. For a time, Breton kept impatiently on, then compassion slowed his step. On a naked ridge top he waited for her. She stumbled often as she came. Once she fell. Breton wondered vaguely why she should be so frail. These Indian women were usually hardy. Nearing the ridge on which he stood, she called, and pointed toward the valley. He followed the direction of her outstretched arm. At first he saw nothing, then he detected a ribbon of smoke which coiled skyward from out a spruce thicket. A camp fire! Food! He yelled hoarsely and plunged recklessly down the rocky ridge wall toward the promised oasis in the arctic desert.

The camp fire was farther away than he had thought. He was breathing hard, and his limbs were heavy with fatigue when he finally approached the clump of head-high spruce from which the curling smoke emanated. In his excitement he did not notice that it was snowing.

The camp was a substantial lean-to, built against a wall of shale. A big fire roared cheerily against this wall. And, bending over this fire, was a man. In one hand the man held a forked stick. Firmly impaled on this green stick was a huge venison steak. Slowly, methodically, unhungrily, the man turned the delectable morsel this way and that over a bed of coals which he had drawn together in a scooped hole in the moss. Mouth watering, eyes only for that inch-thick steak, Pierre Breton drew near. Not until he was within a dozen yards of the little fire did his hungry gaze definitely include the man. Then he stopped in his tracks, his mouth half open, his breathing hard, his eyes staring. That red hair; that evil, white-skinned face! Angus MacQuarrie! His rival for the hand of Julie La Croix. The man he hated, and who hated him. The one man, in all the world, whom he would least have desired to meet.

MacQuarrie, quite occupied with his pleasant task, did not look up at once. In that brief moment of respite, Pierre Breton became, miraculously, the Pierre Breton of old. Again he was the gay *poseur,* confident, assured, laughingly contemptuous of the wealthy, middle-aged fur trader who possessed the temerity to vie with Pierre Breton for the hand of that fairest flower of the North, Julie La Croix. Evidently, MacQuarrie was but now on his way to the Innuit village for that particular dog which was at this moment sleeping soundly on Pierre Breton's back. Pierre laughed.

"Hola, M'sieu'—Rousseau!"

Angus MacQuarrie looked up, instant recognition in his pale eyes; but one man living dared to call him "the red-haired." He scowled fiercely at the laughing Pierre. Legs wide apart, hands on hips, Breton faced his rival across the fire.

"An' so, as usual, the luck goes not with the red hair. Have I not always said it?"

With a flourish, Pierre Breton slid the willow basket from his back to the ground and proudly held up the struggling white puppy.

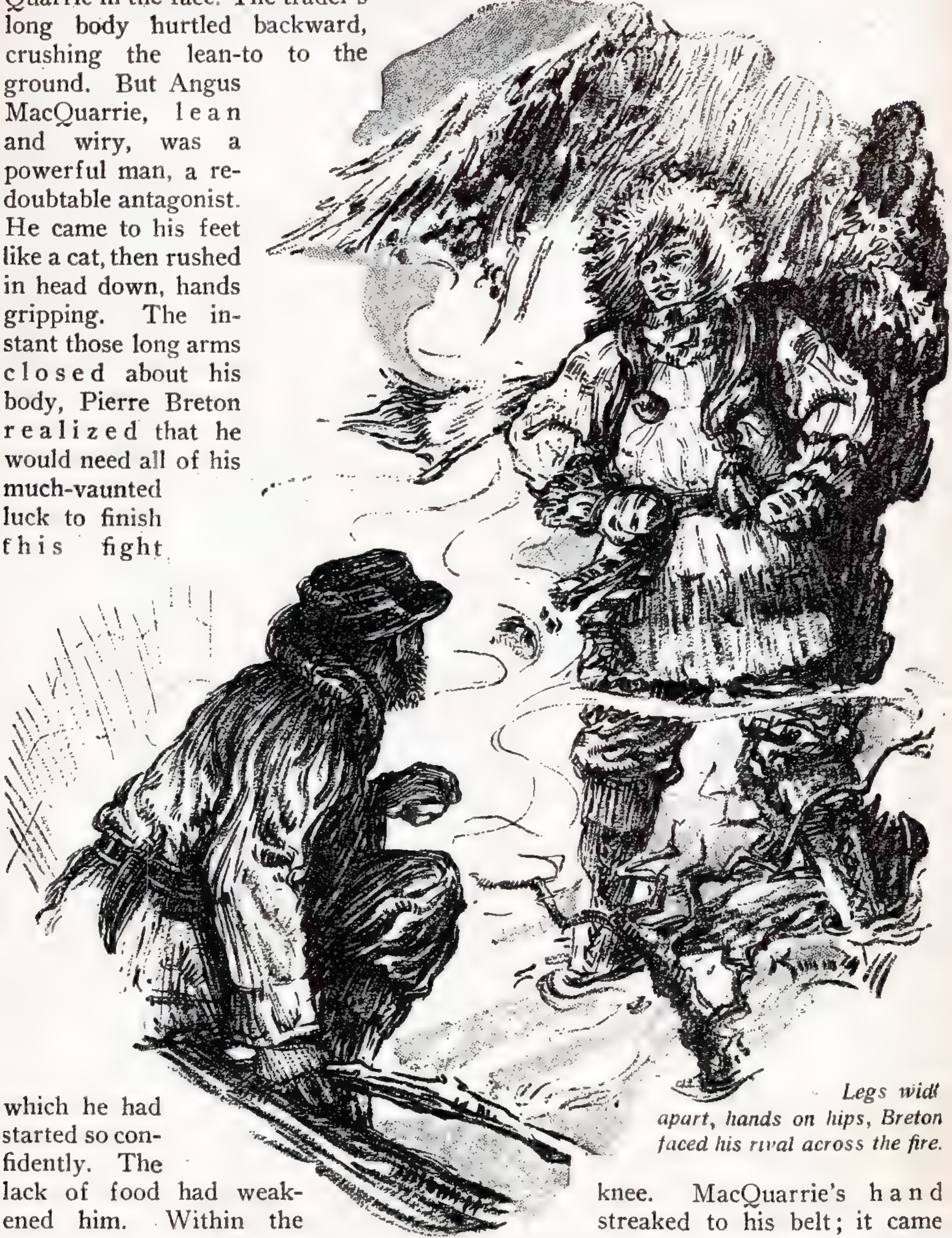
"Witness, m'sieu', Lizette, the queen of all Ungava huskies. An' you are late, as always. The Mamselle Julie makes the weesh, an' voilà! Eet ees done. Pierre Breton——"

But MacQuarrie was laughing. Then a sneer replaced the three-cornered smile. "I wondered if you would be fool enough to do it. You've got a lot to learn in the business of love, young fellow. And did you think that I, too, would be foolish enough to—— Ha, ha, ha!"

Puzzlement made little wrinkles between Pierre Breton's dark eyes. Then came anger. And then, watching Angus MacQuarrie's white face closely, he laughed. MacQuarrie was bluffing, lying, as usual. For the trader was equipped for a long journey; he had snowshoes and dogs; no other possible errand could have brought him to this remote wilderness at this time of the year. Groping for words to say clearly what he thought, ready and eager to force a quarrel, Breton, still watching MacQuarrie's leering face, was suddenly aware that his rival's attention had wavered. The fur trader's fishlike blue eyes rested on something behind Breton. Eetwa! Slowly, wearily, the Indian girl climbed down the slippery slope, aided by a stout stick. She came directly to the fire, and stood, silently, close beside Pierre Breton.

"Your squaw, eh? And you expect Julie to——"

But the insult was never finished. In a single bound, Pierre Breton cleared the fire. His clubbed fist struck Mac-



Legs wide apart, hands on hips, Breton faced his rival across the fire.

Quarrie in the face. The trader's long body hurtled backward, crushing the lean-to to the ground. But Angus MacQuarrie, lean and wiry, was a powerful man, a redoubtable antagonist. He came to his feet like a cat, then rushed in head down, hands gripping. The instant those long arms closed about his body, Pierre Breton realized that he would need all of his much-vaunted luck to finish this fight which he had started so confidently. The lack of food had weakened him. Within the first few minutes of tense struggle, while each fought for a hold, he felt himself weakening. He must finish the fight quickly. With a mighty effort, he broke away. Then, the lucky star failed him. He slipped on the wet moss beside the fire, and dropped on a knee. MacQuarrie's hand streaked to his belt; it came away with a gun. He lifted the heavy weapon high. For an instant the black barrel poised above Breton's head. Then there was a swishing sound, a sickening crunch, and Angus MacQuarrie dropped like a log.

Eetwa, the Indian girl, club in hand,

stood over the fallen man. She was breathing hard. Her face was gray. She swayed and would have fallen, had not Breton caught her. Then she recovered quickly, pulled away from the circle of his supporting arm and calmly replaced her pack which had become dislodged.

MacQuarrie groaned and came to his knees; he pressed both hands to his head. For a long minute Pierre Breton looked down at the pain-twisted face, then he caught the girl by the arm and turned away through the thickening snow toward the south.

The storm quickly developed blizzard-like proportions. It was bitter cold. Pierre Breton knew that his situation was a hopeless one. His food was gone. Had he been in the pink of condition, with the going good, it would have taken him three days to reach André Chatain's cabin. Now he was very weak. And the storm! He couldn't make it. Only by a miracle would Julie La Croix ever see Lizette. Yet he plodded on and on, his abused heart a wildly throbbing, painful thing, seemingly trying to burst out through his heaving breast.

In the lee of an up-rearing wall of rock, he waited for Eetwa. When she did not come he slumped in the snow, back against the wall. It was very comfortable here in the snow. His tired body cried out for sleep. But he should not sleep. To sleep meant to die. Stubbornly he fought against the fateful desire. But the resistance went out of him suddenly, and he slept.

He awoke in response to a persistent tugging at his throat. It was Eetwa, shaking him; and as she shook him she called to him, low-voiced Indian words which he did not understand. There were tears on her cheeks. The instant his eyes fluttered open, Breton realized that, in a few moments more, he would never have awakened. The girl now watched him, a desperate fear in her wide eyes. When he moved she relaxed, slumped forward, and lay like a dead thing across his body.

With considerable effort, Breton lifted her and dragged her inert body farther along the wall. Here, in a cup-shaped depression, he built a fire, heated snow and brewed tea with the last of his precious supplies. He forced the hot liquid between the girl's teeth. But she did not respond. Was she dead? No, no, not that. Twice had she saved his life. He could not let her die. He pressed an ear to her breast but could detect not the slightest heartbeat. Thoroughly frightened now, he fumbled frantically with the leather thongs of her fur coat. He undid them, finally. There was something under her coat, strapped about her body. A large parcel, wrapped in caribou skin. When he opened her coat this parcel came undone. And, as Pierre Breton looked at the contents of that parcel, a mist came into his eyes. And he had hated the poor child because she had lagged on the trail. He had wondered why. And here, before him, was the answer. In that parcel was the greater portion of all the food he had allotted to her during the past two weeks. She had starved herself—for him.

Where there is much love, even though it be a hopeless love, there is also a mighty will to live; and so Eetwa, the Indian girl, did not die. And, that night, huddled close about the roaring fire, sheltered from the storm, she ate, under Pierre Breton's watchful eye, mouthful for mouthful, even as he ate, of the precious food which she had hoarded.

In the morning the storm was greatly lessened, and, refreshed by a night's sleep, with a full stomach and sufficient food for at least two days, Pierre Breton started out, followed closely by the patient Eetwa. This morning, Eetwa's step was light, and her dark face was radiant, for, no longer did the handsome white man from the South hate her. She knew. Perhaps all would yet be well.

Beyond the first line of snow-covered mountains, the storm petered out altogether. There had been little snow here.

With a day's supply of food still intact, they reached André Chatain's cabin, and, a week later, driving a dog team loaned by his good friend André Chatain, Pierre Breton mushed into the little settlement at Nordden House, a great happiness in his heart and the coveted prize, Lizette, snarling and struggling in his arms.

But there was disappointment awaiting the gay adventurer who enjoyed, beyond all else, the friendly ado usually accorded a wanderer returning from a long journey. For the races were on at Nordden House. The little settlement was abustle with excitement, and so great was this interest in the annual sled race, that he attracted little attention as he mushed bravely down the main street. He was vaguely depressed at lack of the noisy welcome which he had anticipated, and this depression was by no means lessened when he espied Angus MacQuarrie in a throng of eager watchers, waiting for the first of the dog teams to appear. With MacQuarrie was Noiraud La Croix, Julie's father, and Julie herself. The girl stood on a little raised platform, one arm resting on MacQuarrie's shoulders, her eager eyes on the Loon Lake Trail. All eyes were fixed on that outbound trail, from which direction the weary dog teams would come. None so much as saw Pierre Breton. And for the first time in his life, Breton was not interested in this Northland classic. His eyes were only for Julie La Croix, and his thoughts were troubled ones. MacQuarrie had hurried back to Nordden House, with a definite purpose in mind, without doubt. What had he told Noiraud La Croix and Julie? Pierre Breton could guess. He had told about Eetwa, of course. Had made his rival out a squaw man. What else his evil tongue might have spread, was problematical. A great liar was Angus MacQuarrie, and a skillful one.

It was impossible to come near that little platform which had evidently been constructed especially for the fair Julie by Angus MacQuarrie. The dog teams were due at any moment. A hush of breathless anticipation had settled over the motley crowd. In this stillness, Pierre Breton was the only moving thing. He worked through the crowd so as to come as near as possible to the raised platform. All three of the watchers on the platform espied him at the same time. Julie La Croix cried out and waved her white-mittened hand. She started to come down the steps toward Breton, but Noiraud La Croix caught her arm. She resisted her father's hold, and spoke words of soft-voiced entreaty into his ear. Noiraud La Croix hesitated. He liked Pierre Breton, as a man, and too, he liked Angus MacQuarrie's wealth. Finally, he shook his head.

"Angus has spoken truth, *chérie*. See, the Innuit woman is with him."

The words came indistinctly to Pierre Breton. A mighty clamor cut La Croix short. The first of the dog teams had appeared. Pierre Breton turned away through the yelling throng. His heart was as lead. Did Julie La Croix believe that he was a squaw man? No, she would never believe that. There was something else. For, when Julie La Croix willed to do a thing, she did it. If she had wanted to come to him, she would have done so. A dozen fathers would not have prevented her; certainly not an indulgent father, such as Noiraud La Croix was.

On the trail, two racing dog teams passed him, but Pierre Breton did not see them. Straight to the La Croix cabin he went. He entered the familiar, cozy building. The place was deserted. He opened the door to Julie La Croix's room and thrust the ever-snarling Lizette inside. Then, as he turned away, a great commotion developed within that room. He came back. Two white puppies, rolling, tumbling fluffs of noisy fur, battled there on the floor. Pierre tore them apart; held them aloft, one in each hand. Instantly, he knew why Julie La Croix had not come to him.

Angus MacQuarrie had brought her *a* white bitch; and he had sworn that he had obtained that dog from Amlik the Eskimo, on the shores of the Tallic Sea. Yes, that was what that lying devil had done. And, true to her promise, Julie had then listened to his proposal of love.

Half an hour later in his own cabin on the edge of the town, Pierre Breton paced the length of the little room like a caged animal. For the first time in his happy-go-lucky existence, he was gripped by a killing rage. Angus MacQuarrie had beaten him, by a trick. Julie did not know this, of course. The Ungava husky had, at first, been merely a whim of Julie's. Noiraud La Croix had suggested that it form the basis for the bestowal of her hand in marriage. And he, Pierre Breton, self-assured, overconfident, as ever, had enthusiastically supported the suggestion. Julie had demurred; but his enthusiasm had finally overcome her protests and she had consented. Now, she would keep her promise. A promise was a sacred thing to Julie La Croix. The only way out was to prove MacQuarrie's trickery. The trader's tracks would be well covered, of course. Only by patient watching and waiting could a clew to his trickery be secured.

But this game of patience was not Pierre Breton's game. Although thoroughly convinced that this was the only course open to him, he could not bring himself to accept it. He longed to confront Angus MacQuarrie, to give him the lie, to fight.

Toward evening Eetwa prepared food. Pierre was trying hard to show his appreciation of the girl's thoughtfulness by forcing himself to eat, when a messenger arrived with a note from Julie La Croix. Breton knew it was word from Julie the moment he recognized David, the handsome Indian lad, who, ever since she had saved him from the angry rapids of Cattell's Run years before, had been Julie's devoted slave. David had been educated and was far removed, physically and mentally, from the lazy tribe of Crees to which he belonged. At first glance, the lad was evidently greatly interested in Eetwa. This much Breton saw, even as he hastily scanned the note from Julie La Croix.

It was what he had expected; no more, no less. She thanked him for the dog. She was sorry, et cetera. Her marriage with MacQuarrie had been set for March 1st. Breton crumpled the sheet in his palm. Then, for long minutes he stared unseeing down at the wrinkled pink sheet, despair tugging at his heart.

Finally, he became aware that the Indian lad was still there. He and Eetwa stood side by side near the fire. They were talking, in low tones. Pierre Breton smiled sadly. Here was love, apparently, at first sight. He called them to him.

"David, thees ees Eetwa. You know her already, eh? Ha—she ees good girl, David. She save my life—back there, an' I would see that she has the good home. Will you not take her to your people? See that she is treated as the daughter of a chief should be treated? I, Pierre Breton, will see that there ees money in plenty. An' make eet ver' clear, David, that he who ill-treats her ees responsible—to me. An' if she ees to marry, I am to pass judgment on the man that is chosen."

David nodded. "Eet shall be as you say, m'sieu'." The lad hesitated, his eyes narrowing curiously as though he were attempting to convey a veiled message of some sort to his friend, Pierre.

"What eet ees, David? Don' be 'fraid."

The boy did not reply. He ushered the somewhat bewildered Eetwa into the kitchen, closed the door, and returned.

"The Mamselle Julie, she cry all tam, m'sieu'."

Breton feigned not to hear. The lad had something to say besides this.

"An' MacQuarrie, a bad man for sure, m'sieu'."

Still Breton made no sign.

"That dog he breeng to the Mamselle Julie, ees no Ungava husky, M'sieu' Pierre. She comes from 'French Tom,' two otter skin for that dog. An' much whisky. An' he tell Tom to be ver' quiet 'bout that dog. But Tom, he suspec' somet'ing. He ees here now. He knows why MacQuarrie pay the great price for that white dog. *I* tell heem. MacQuarrie pays Tom more money. Bimeby he will refuse to pay still more, an' then, Tom, he weel talk. I know."

As the Indian lad talked, the shadow of despair left Pierre Breton's face. His eyes gleamed. He came to his feet and placed his hands affectionately about the boy's shoulders.

"David, you are the true fr'en.' An' how can I thank you? I know not, except that I may help you—with Eetwa. For witness, David, she ees not my woman, nor ever has been. She ees good girl. An', I t'ink, you like her. Now, this French Tom, maybe I talk wit' heem."

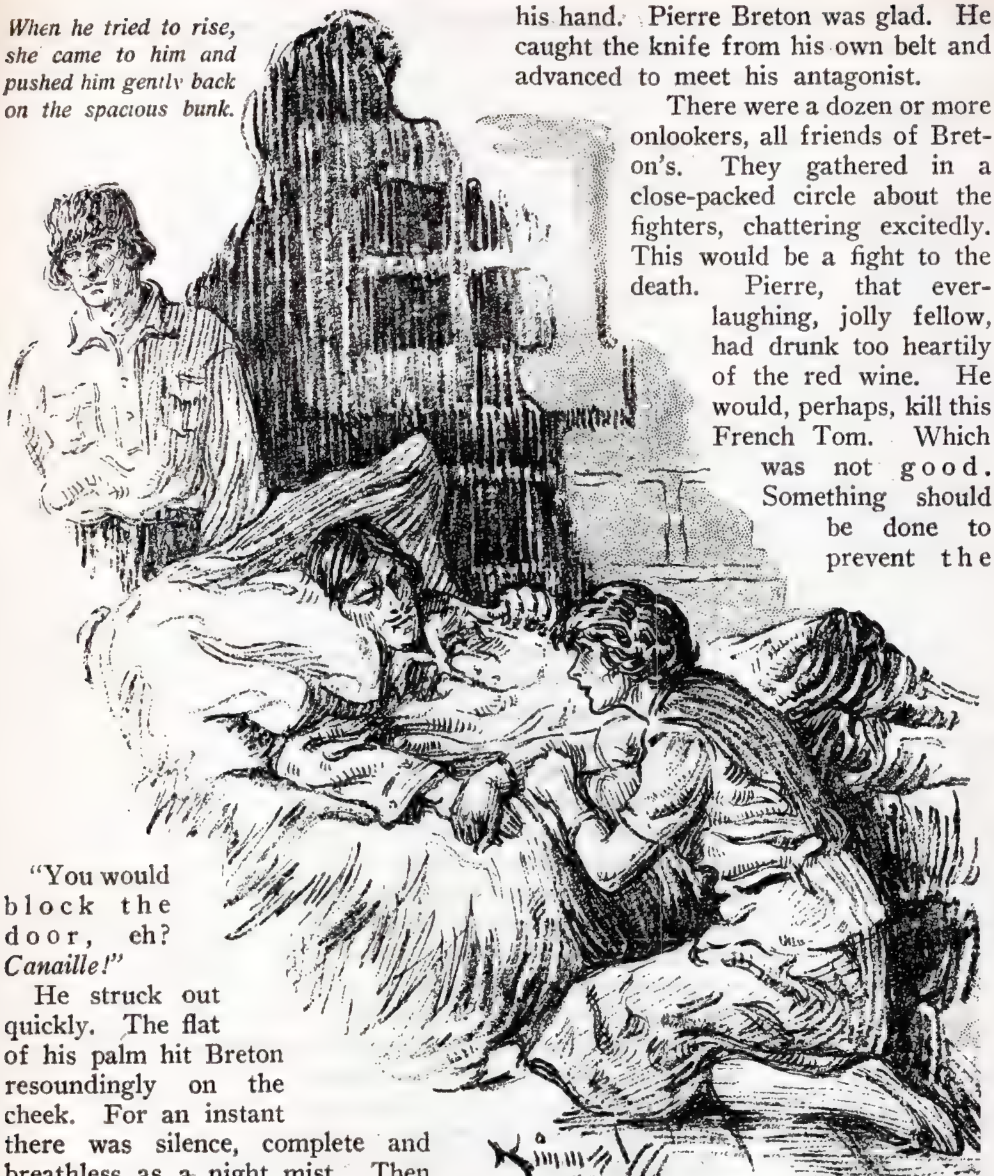
David shrugged doubtfully. "Eet ees not good that you let heem know, what I have just told you, m'sieu'. So long as MacQuarrie pays heem, he ees MacQuarrie's man. Bimeby he talk. Wait."

Which was very good advice. French Tom was a drunken, thieving, good-for-nothing half-breed. Withal, he was an arbitrary scoundrel; could not be made to talk, if he would not. Of all this Pierre Breton was well aware. Common sense argued that he let matters take their course. But inaction was an impossible thing for Pierre Breton.

For an hour after David and Eetwa had left, he sat before the open fire, smoking furiously. Then he jumped to his feet and hurried away into the night.

At the settlement excitement still ran high. Gaspard Geronde, a local favorite, had won the dog race. Breton went from place to place, laughing, jesting, drinking with his many friends. And always, although perhaps not definitely aware of it himself, he was looking for French Tom, the breed. At last, when about ready to return to his cabin, he came face to face with his man, and in such a manner that all of his good resolutions were forcibly thrust aside.

As a rule, Breton was not a heavy drinker. This night, however, he drank more than was his custom. Leaving the little log-walled saloon, he paused in the open doorway and breathed deeply of the cool night air to clear away the mists that were beginning to dim his vision. As he stood there, he became aware of three dark forms, half hidden in the shadows. He recognized Angus MacQuarrie's voice, although he did not see the man. The other two he saw, French Tom and "Black Karble." Karble was a newcomer, a sleek, shifty-eyed Yankee, whose means of livelihood was a puzzle to all. MacQuarrie slunk away, and French Tom, reeling drunkenly, sought to push past Breton into the saloon. Karble followed close at Tom's heels. Breton gave way unwillingly, backing into the lighted room. But French Tom was ugly. He elbowed Breton unnecessarily.



When he tried to rise, she came to him and pushed him gently back on the spacious bunk.

"You would block the door, eh? *Canaille!*"

He struck out quickly. The flat of his palm hit Breton resoundingly on the cheek. For an instant there was silence, complete and breathless as a night mist. Then with an oath, Pierre Breton struck out, a wide-swinging, powerful blow, with the full strength of his long-pent-up rage behind it. His fist struck French Tom full in the face, and the breed's thick body shot backward as though projected from a catapult, and landed, crashingly, against the wall.

He was on his feet like a cat, however, and swearing vividly, crossed the room, a short-bladed knife gleaming in his hand. Pierre Breton was glad. He caught the knife from his own belt and advanced to meet his antagonist.

There were a dozen or more onlookers, all friends of Breton's. They gathered in a close-packed circle about the fighters, chattering excitedly. This would be a fight to the death. Pierre, that ever-laughing, jolly fellow, had drunk too heartily of the red wine. He would, perhaps, kill this French Tom. Which was not good. Something should be done to prevent the fight. They called to him, but he did not hear. His gleaming black eyes never left French Tom's whiskered face.

Suddenly they came together. French Tom's down-flashing blade ripped into Breton's side, cutting an ugly gash along his ribs. Breton's blade, deflected somewhat by his opponent's writhing body, glanced off from the breed's shoulder, ripping the heavy Mackinaw neatly from shoulder to wrist. They clinched; struggled mightily; fell to the floor, each seeking to free his knife arm. Breton's head struck solidly against the jutting wall. Varicolored stars danced in a red blur before his eyes. But he fought on, breathing hard, clutching desperately at his opponent's knife arm, striving to free his own blade. Many hands tugged at him, trying to pull him away. He swore angrily at these would-be friends. Suddenly, there was darkness. Some one had smashed the swinging oil lamp. French Tom's body relaxed. In a daze, Breton allowed himself to be lifted. He realized that he was being half dragged, half carried out of the room.

The cold air revived him somewhat, and he found himself stumbling along the moonlit roadway away from the village, supported on either side by a man. He did not recognize these men. His step grew stronger. He shook himself free. These men were no longer his friends. For witness, had they not broken up the grand fight? With unintelligible but friendly words, they left him near his cabin. Still dazed, but still in a rage, he waited until he was sure they were gone. Then he turned right about, and, staggering as he went, made again for the town.

The mud-rutted street was in darkness, now, and all but deserted. The few whom he met avoided him. A single purpose was uppermost in his muddled thoughts. He would find French Tom; that fight would be finished. Two dark forms appeared before him. A light flared in a cabin, and in this finger of light, Breton recognized Karble and French Tom. The latter's dark face was crimson; his clothes were in tatters; he staggered when he walked. With an exultant cry, Pierre Breton sprang forward. But he had reckoned beyond his strength. He had lost much blood and was very weak. When he had come to within a rod of the two men, his legs gave way. He fell. Blackness enveloped him.

When he groped back to consciousness he lay flat on his back on the floor in his own cabin. It was gray dawn. He was weak and sick. The cabin walls spun about in erratic circles before his eyes. A dark figure stood framed in the half-open door. With much difficulty, he focused his gaze on this figure. David! The Indian lad was dressed for a journey. He peered out over the trail toward Nordden House, and his dark face was tingling with some pent-up emotion. He carried a rifle, too. Breton watched, wondering. Suddenly, the tinkle of sleigh bells sounded. The Indian lad lifted the rifle, then lowered it with a sigh of relief. Breton tried to call out, but only mumbled wordlessly. He was too weak to rise. David vanished, to return in a moment with Eetwa. The girl was breathing hard. She had evidently traveled far and fast.

"Ah, he ees awake. No, no, don't talk now."

With swift, sure movements they lifted him between them, carried him and deposited his limp weight gently in a sled. It was Julie La Croix's sled, drawn by ten snow-white huskies. So much Pierre Breton glimpsed. Eetwa knelt behind, David snapped the long whip, and, in a smother of snow dust, the team whisked away toward the hills.

Bewildered and sick, Breton clung to the sides of the lurching sled. Within the first half hour, he had lost all sense of direction. David chose the least-used and most dangerous trails. What did it mean, this aimless journey? Flight, apparently. But from what? What had happened?

It was mid-afternoon when the weary dogs slid to a stop far back in the hills before a tiny cabin, half hidden behind a jutting wall of ice-hung rock. Breton was lifted and carried into the cabin.

An open fire burned brightly, and, stooping over this fire, her golden hair gleaming in the ruddy light, was Julie La Croix. There were red patches on her cheeks, as though she had been crying. When he tried to rise, she came to him and pushed him gently back on the spacious bunk. Then she smiled sadly, stooped and kissed his cold cheek. When he would have held her, however, she drew away.

"I go now, *chéri.* Eet mus' be so. God watch over you."

At the door she talked in a low voice with David and Eetwa, then hurried away. The tinkle of bells soon told that she was gone.

"David!" Breton was surprised at his own voice. It was thin and toneless, and seemed to come from a great distance.

The Indian lad approached with a bowl of steaming broth and a wooden spoon. But Breton had no appetite for food.

"Tell me, David. What ees eet?"

"Eet—eet ees ver' bad. Las' night, French Tom was murdered. A knife in the back. You fought wit' heem. They suspect you.

"I fin' you, las' night, an' carry you to your cabin. You are hurt; lose much blood. I feex you up, an' bimeby Eetwa comes to tell that French Tom's body has been found. I send her to the Mamselle Julie for the dogs. Mamselle Julie say come here. We come."

"An' the police?"

"They are at Nordden House by now. But, nevair weel they fin' this place. No, nevair!"

In the days that followed, Pierre Breton was a very sick man. Caused initially by the knife wound and aggravated by his many troubles, a fever laid firm hold upon him. For many days and nights he hovered between life and death. Always in the brief lucid intervals, familiar faces were before him, Julie La Croix, David, and Eetwa. One of these three was always at his side.

One bright winter morning he awoke clear eyed and sane, the fever gone. With his recovery assured, he saw Julie La Croix but seldom. When she did appear, it was for brief intervals only. She had become pale and thin and always her face was sad; always were her eyes red as though she had been crying.

Once rid of the fever, Breton gained strength rapidly. And, with the red blood of health once more running in his veins, he longed for action.

It was Eetwa who pleaded with him to be patient.

"Please, m'sieu', jus' one more week. Eef you go now, you weel be capture', surely. The police watch everywhere. One more week, please."

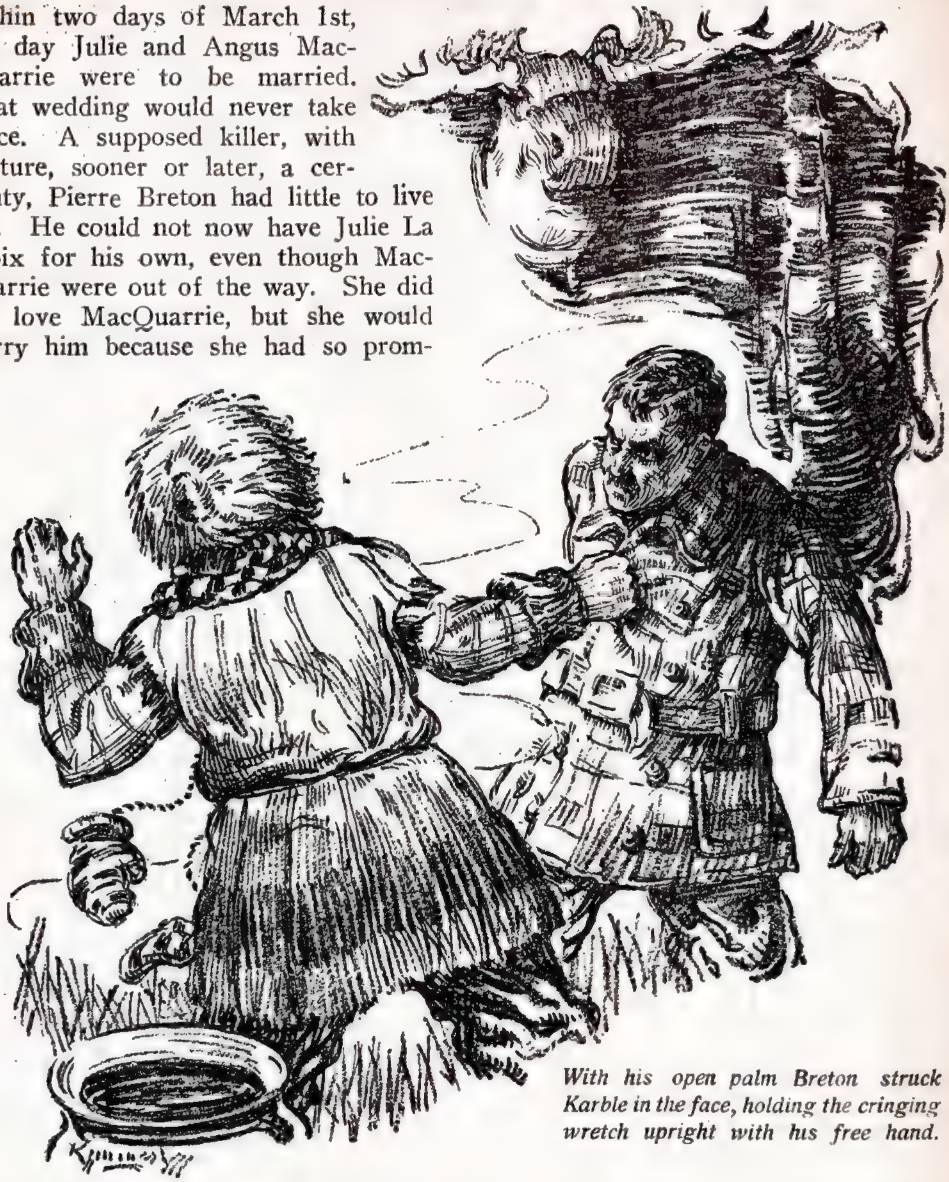
Breton, strangely moved by the Indian girl's earnestness, promised. He did not know why he promised. One week. What did this sloe-eyed girl have in mind? David did not know. Something had happened between David and Eetwa. They had apparently quarreled.

"*Non,* there ees no quarrel, m'sieu'."

"But, there ees somet'ing, David."

Finally, the Indian lad unbosomed himself. "*Oui,* we were to marry, Eetwa an' me, in the spring. Now, she say no. All tam, she ees wit' this *loup-garou,* Black Karble. He ees bad feller, for sure. She knows. We do not quarrel, Eetwa an' me, no. But——"

All during the week there was no sign of Julie or Eetwa. Breton was frantic with impatience; a thousand times he chided himself for having given his word to the Indian girl. David was indeed a woeful companion. Breton's heart ached for the lad. Was it possible that Eetwa had fallen in love with that shifty-eyed breed, Karble? Possible, yes. Karble was white, and handsome in a crude, vulpine sort of way. Breton's impatience was augmented by the fact that the end of the week was within two days of March 1st, the day Julie and Angus MacQuarrie were to be married. That wedding would never take place. A supposed killer, with capture, sooner or later, a certainty, Pierre Breton had little to live for. He could not now have Julie La Croix for his own, even though MacQuarrie were out of the way. She did not love MacQuarrie, but she would marry him because she had so promised. The least Pierre Breton could do for his loved one was to relieve her of the necessity for keeping that odious promise. He would kill Angus MacQuarrie; then he would give himself up.



With his open palm Breton struck Karble in the face, holding the cringing wretch upright with his free hand.

Eetwa appeared at the end of the week.

"You weel come, alone, to the Mamselle La Croix's to-night at seven," she said. For a long minute she looked up into Breton's face. And, deep in those mist-blurred eyes, there was a great love. Pierre Breton knew. He fidgeted uneasily. What did this girl intend doing? Some terrible thing, he was sure. He should prevent her. But she evaded his questions skillfully, and finally, with only a passing glance at the dejected David, she hurried away.

"She say, alone, David."

"*Oui,* but I come, jus' the same."

Breton shrugged. "I would not prevent you, my fr'en'. One thing only I ask: seek not to prevent me from killing this dog MacQuarrie. I weel hang, an'way, for a thing I did not do; why then shall I not hang for a just cause? But, I weel keep my word to Eetwa: first I weel go to Julie La Croix's, then weel I seek out this devil."

Breton's impatience brought him half an hour before seven o'clock to the La Croix cabin. Removing his snowshoes before the door, he peered in at the big window. A flash of red was the first thing to catch his eye. A red coat. The police! They were in there, waiting for him. He caught David by the arm. "A trap!" Together they peered in at the little window. There were several people in there, grouped about a table. Noiraud La Croix and Julie; a grizzled sergeant of police, Eetwa, and Black Karble. Eetwa was dressed resplendently in one of Julie La Croix' cast-off gowns. She was darkly beautiful. Breton swore softly. It didn't seem possible. Perhaps the policeman's presence was accidental? He intended to find out. With the edge of his knife he pried away a strip of moss from about the window. Through this slit the sound of voices came clearly.

"—as you say, Karble, your record is clear. Now, let's hear your story." This was the policeman speaking. Breton pressed his ear to the crack. Karble's heavy voice came clearly.

"MacQuarrie killed French Tom. I saw him do it. I was takin' Tom home after his fight with Breton. Tom was all in. Then, that crazy Breton showed up again. Both him an' Tom was done up; ef they got together it would mean a killin', sure. I beat it, not wantin' t' git mixed up in anythin' like that. I hid behin' a shack, an' watched. Breton caved in before he reached Tom. Then MacQuarrie came along. He had been following Tom an' me. He rolled Breton over an' listened to his heart. Then he took Breton's knife, and stabbed Tom in the back with it. Then he ran. Tom crawled away groanin', but I didn't dare go near him. An Indian came up and carried Breton away."

Karble paused, moistened his dry lips and glanced nervously down at Eetwa. He spoke to her. "Does—does thet do it, honey?"

"Tell of the dog," she demanded.

He nodded. "Thet husky bitch: MacQuarrie bought it off'n Tom. He paid a good price fer it, and, fer Tom's silence. But Tom always was a fool. He came here an' blackmailed MacQuarrie. Thet was one o' the reasons MacQuarrie killed him."

Eetwa smiled brightly up into Karble's face. He tried to take her hand.

Following the conclusion of Karble's story, there was silence in the little room. It was broken finally by the police sergeant. "And now, my friends," he said, "you who all have believed so earnestly in the innocence of that upright young man, Pierre Breton, have this simple child, Eetwa, to thank for this confession. To secure it, she has offered to marry this—this person, Black Karble. Think of this, my friends, when you consider that you have sacrificed much for the happiness of others. Truly, this child has shown us the meaning of—love."

Again there was silence in that little room. Julie La Croix sobbed on her father's shoulder. Breton, watching, listening, heard a low moan at his side. David, the Indian lad, knelt in the snow, head in hand, sobbing. A great rage suddenly swept over Pierre Breton. "Weep not, my fr'en'. I come here to keel a man. An', I t'ink maybe I keel a wolf, too."

He threw open the heavy door, and stood, breathing hard, his haggard form outlined ruggedly against the night. All eyes turned to his twitching face. *He* saw none but Black Karble. In a single stride he faced the man. His long fingers sought and found the cringing man's throat. With a single mighty heave he lifted Karble bodily over the table.

"She promise to marry you, eh? Eef you tell the story? *Canaille!* An' t'ink you I would let that girl marry such as you? *Non,* first would I hang. A dozen time would I hang. Bah!"

With his open palm Breton struck Karble in the face, holding the cringing wretch upright with his free hand. Again and again he struck until the sleek face was smeared with crimson. "You go 'way from here, Meestair Black Karble. You go queeck, eh? An' you don' come back. *Oui?* Eet ees good." He released his grip abruptly and with a shove and a well-directed kick sent Black Karble's body hurtling out through the doorway.

Ten minutes later, Angus MacQuarrie was arrested as he sauntered confidently up to the La Croix cabin, bearing a gaudily wrapped box of candy for his bride-to-be.

But there were four people in the La Croix cabin who knew nothing of this. Eetwa and David were in the kitchen manufacturing popcorn over the pot-bellied Yukon stove; and Pierre Breton and Julie La Croix were seated on a great sofa before the open fire. Breton was very happy. But, somehow, the old smile had as yet failed to find place on his lean face. Even as he looked down upon the golden head pillowed on his shoulder, his thoughts were equally divided between this fair-haired girl who was soon to become his wife, and that other, Eetwa, simple child of the wilderness, who would have given herself to a man whom she hated, in order that he, Pierre Breton, might find happiness.

* * *

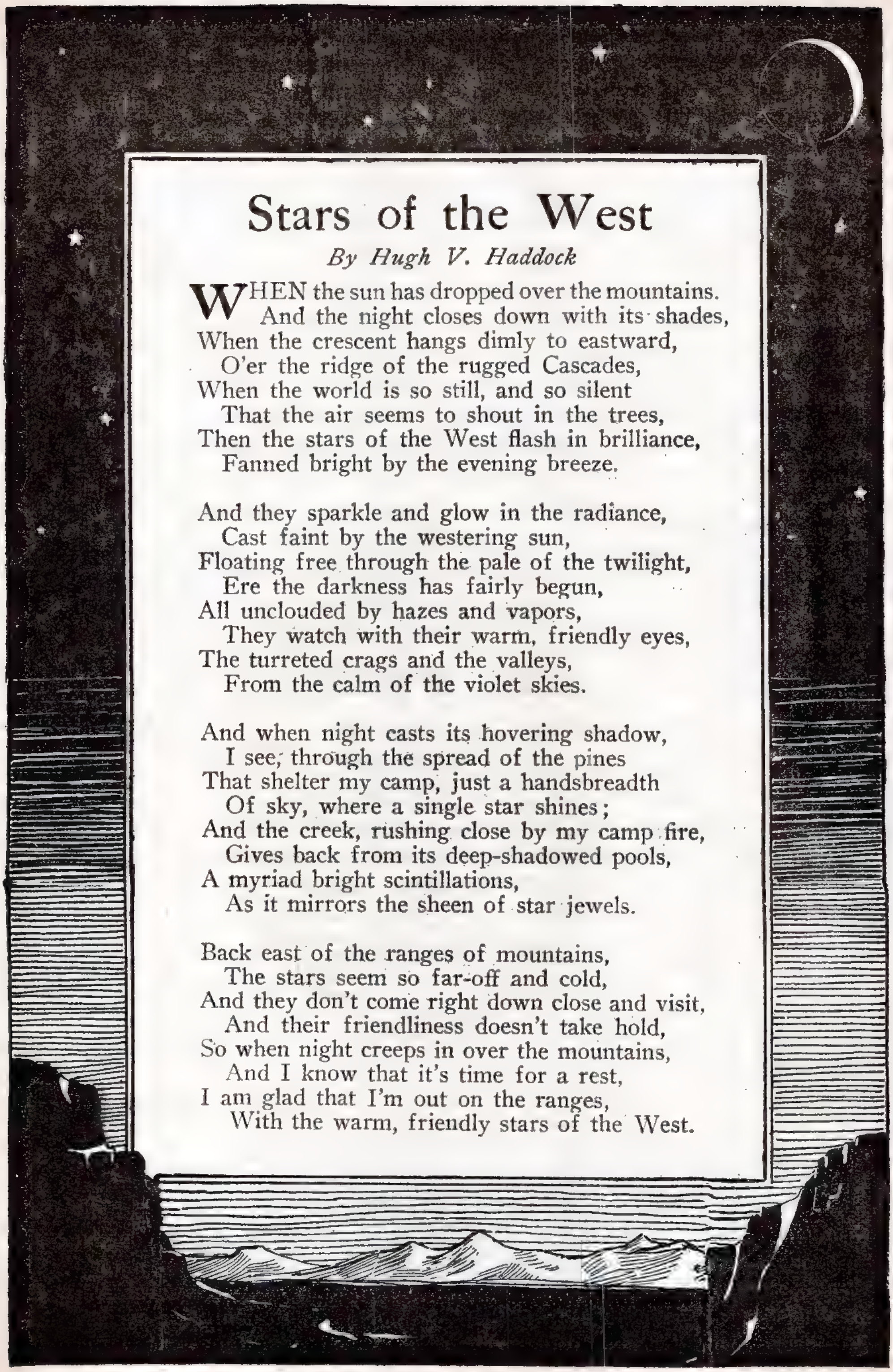
A Royal Ranch

THE recent passing away of the famous Canadian cattleman, George Lane, was sincerely mourned by his fellow ranchers of western Canada, as well as by his friends in the United States and the eastern part of the Dominion.

George Lane, of the Bar U Ranch, was a picturesque specimen of the modern cattle baron. He was as skillful as any top hand at cutting out, roping, branding, and other details of range work—a thoroughly practical cowman. His ranch holdings of some sixty thousand acres adjoined the famous E P Ranch, purchased a few years ago by the Prince of Wales. It was George Lane who interested the heir to the British throne in ranching out on the prairies of Western Canada, and it was at his suggestion that the prince became owner of the E P, the initials standing for "Edward Prince."

A genial and lovable personality, with the breezy, rough-and-ready cordiality of the true Westerner, George Lane took a great interest in the progress of his royal protégé as a cattleman, and the two were firm friends. Lane instructed the prince in various phases of the cowboy art, such as cutting out, roping, branding, riding herd, et cetera, and on occasion would address the future ruler of the empire on which the sun never sets as "young feller," much to the delight of that versatile and democratic royal personage.

Although a prominent figure in the cattle country of western Canada, for a number of years past, Mr. Lane was an American by birth, coming originally from Iowa.



Stars of the West

By Hugh V. Haddock

WHEN the sun has dropped over the mountains.
And the night closes down with its shades,
When the crescent hangs dimly to eastward,
O'er the ridge of the rugged Cascades,
When the world is so still, and so silent
That the air seems to shout in the trees,
Then the stars of the West flash in brilliance,
Fanned bright by the evening breeze.

And they sparkle and glow in the radiance,
Cast faint by the westering sun,
Floating free through the pale of the twilight,
Ere the darkness has fairly begun,
All unclouded by hazes and vapors,
They watch with their warm, friendly eyes,
The turreted crags and the valleys,
From the calm of the violet skies.

And when night casts its hovering shadow,
I see, through the spread of the pines
That shelter my camp, just a handsbreadth
Of sky, where a single star shines;
And the creek, rushing close by my camp fire,
Gives back from its deep-shadowed pools,
A myriad bright scintillations,
As it mirrors the sheen of star jewels.

Back east of the ranges of mountains,
The stars seem so far-off and cold,
And they don't come right down close and visit,
And their friendliness doesn't take hold,
So when night creeps in over the mountains,
And I know that it's time for a rest,
I am glad that I'm out on the ranges,
With the warm, friendly stars of the West.

Wonder Cities of the West

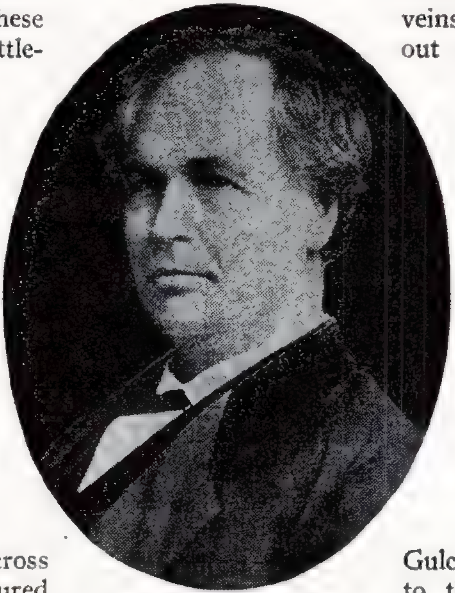
DENVER

By Erle Wilson

"The Queen City of the Plains"

WHAT is now Denver, was originally two small hamlets, perched on opposite sides of Cherry Creek. For over a year it had two names and two identities. The scattering of huts on the west bank of this Colorado stream was christened Auraria, while that on the east was called Denver City. Gold was responsible for the birth of these pioneer western settlements, for although the site had been visited by early explorers and camped upon by adventurous fur trappers, it was not until yellow nuggets were discovered in Cherry Creek along in the year 1858 that men permanently settled there.

As soon as the news of the discovery went forth, a national pilgrimage across the plains set in. Lured by the thought of sudden and great wealth, emigrants willingly endured the toilsome overland trek of hundreds of miles, and the parching thirst of the desert. Doggedly they built shacks and huts along the dry bed of Cherry Creek, and started to dig. It was soon learned, however, that there was not enough precious metal in the shallow little stream to justify the journey. The most energetic miner was unable to wrest more than sixty or seventy cents a day from the earth.



Courtesy Denver Tourist Bureau

General James W. Denver, for whom the city was named.

In consequence, the settlers of the two straggling hamlets fell upon hard times. The diggings didn't pay. The ground in which the confident miners had expected to find rich veins of gold dust turned out to be a flat prairie which supported only tumbleweeds, prairie dogs, and cactus plants. The attendant hardships were almost more than the pioneers could endure, sturdy though they were, and it seemed as if the twin hamlets would pass out of existence. Then on May 6, 1859, a rich vein of quartz was found in Gregory Gulch about thirty miles to the northwest of the Cherry Creek outposts.

Once more the news of a discovery went forth, and again men flocked to the Colorado diggings, this time in greater numbers. The two towns on Cherry Creek became typical mining settlements of the pioneer West. Prospectors first lived in tents. Then cabins were built. Stores were opened, and although prices were exorbitant—sugar, coffee and tobacco being worth their weight in gold dust—a lively business was carried on.

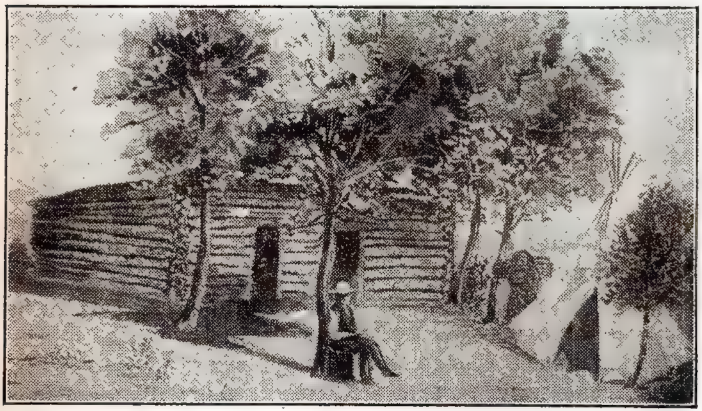
As was to be expected, a number of adventurers, two-gun men, and hard characters had flocked to the twin towns along with the influx of honest prospectors. Although the Cherry Creek settlements were part of Kansas Territory in these pioneer days, the arm of the law was not quite long enough to make the reach. In consequence existence was pretty much of a gamble. Shooting matches were part of the daily program, speed on the draw being the surest road to long life.

Land jumping was also a popular pastime, possession being considered more than nine points of the law. If a man left his mining claim or town plot for a day or two, he usually found it, upon his return, occupied by a newcomer who was installed in a hastily erected shack. Instead of finding the latchstring out, he stared into the protruding barrel end of a six-shooter. Altogether '59 was a lively year along the banks of Cherry Creek. To add to the excitement there was bitter rivalry between the two hamlets, which were located on opposite sides of the stream.

Along in '60, however, Auraria and Denver City decided to forget their enmity and join hands in civic union. So the rival settlements were consolidated and received a city charter from the first Colorado Territorial Legislature. They adopted the name of Denver, in honor of General James William Denver, Governor of Kansas Territory, which then included Colorado. The population of the newly created Denver was less than one thousand persons. But gradually the small western town on the edge of the wilderness took on the outward forms of civilization. Soon a newspaper called the *Rocky Mountain News* appeared on the streets. Then two citizens established a private mint and bank which became the great financial institution of pioneer times in Denver.

The next step in the town's progress was the starting of a stage line between Denver and Leavenworth, Kansas. This early transportation line of the West was called the Leavenworth and Pikes Peak Express Company, and the big lumbering coaches which brought passengers also brought the mail. Denver's original post office was located in the office of the express company, where twenty-five cents was charged for each letter. As gold dust, carried in a doeskin sack or a small glass bottle, was the currency of the mining country, clerks weighed out the payment on scales for this purpose. The process consumed considerable time, and when the mail was unusually heavy it was not an uncommon sight to see hundreds of men waiting in a line so long that it took hours to move it.

Prominent in the early life of Denver was the city's first hotel, a large log structure known as "The Eldorado." This western hostelry was



Courtesy Denver Tourist Bureau

The first cabin on the site of pioneer Denver.

operated by Murat and Smoke, the former member of the firm, Count Henry Murat, hailing from Hanover, Germany. He had come to the new country in quest of a fortune and had brought his blue-eyed, golden-haired wife Katrina along. And so, although Denver's first hotel guests did not have meals prepared by a French chef. they did sit down to dinners cooked by a countess. Nor did the titled cook seem to mind her job. She bravely endured the hardships of frontier life and stayed on, winning for herself the title of "The Mother of Colorado." It was Countess Murat, in fact, who made the first American flag that showed its colors in the Denver breeze.

In common with most young and struggling towns, Denver had its share of difficulties. This pioneer Colorado city was visited by two calamities during the early '60s. In '63 a severe conflagration did great damage, and in the spring of the following year a terrible flood came rushing down Cherry Creek, washing away business houses and many dwellings. Nor did troubles cease after these disasters. Shortly afterward a great Indian war broke out, practically cutting off all communication between Colorado towns and the States.

Courtesy Denver Tourist Bureau

Lawrence and Sixteenth Streets, 1925. Daniels & Fisher tower, three hundred and thirty feet high, a commercial adaptation of the campanile in Venice.

Difficulties continued in fact until the rail took the place of the trail. During its infancy Denver was not on the transcontinental travel routes, and it was a red-letter day in the town's history when the first train of the Kansas Pacific Railway wheezed into the little stone passenger and freight depot.

Denver's real growth now began. In 1868 it became the capital of Colorado Territory. During the '70s all the facilities of a modern city, including gas, street cars, waterworks, and telephones were introduced. The fame of this western mining town spread far and wide. Among the celebrated sportsmen who visited the town during the illustrious '70s was the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia, for whom a great buffalo hunt on the plains, under the skillful guidance of the famous scout Buffalo Bill, was given.

Denver continued to prosper. During the '80s there was a boom in real estate and the population increased by leaps and bounds. To-day Denver, with an estimated population of three hundred and twenty-five thousand, is the largest city between Kansas City, Missouri, and the Pacific coast. It is situated on both sides of the South Platte at its junction with Cherry Creek and commands a magnificent view of the Rocky Mountains from Pikes Peak to Longs Peak. A mile above sea level, Denver has a superb climate.

The city is famed for its beautiful buildings. In its heart stands the Civic Center, embracing some four acres. To the east is the impressive capitol built of Colorado granite. Flanking the capitol are the marble State Office Building, and the building of the State Historical Museum which houses splendid collections of prehistoric and Indian life, as well as relics of pioneer days. The public library, a structure of great architectural loveliness, rises to the west of the capitol.

This western city is a pleasant place in which to dwell. The cost of living is lower, according to government reports, than in any other American city. Consequently Colorado's capital is a city of homes. Back of the Civic Center, ascending the bluff, where the stagecoach once swept into Denver, to-day stretch miles upon miles of residences. There is no congested district. The laborer's cottage is bathed in sunshine and surrounded by flowers and grass. Denver's schools have kept pace with the city's growth, and educational advantages to-day are splendid.

Denver has always been an amusement-loving city. Old citizens remember the town's early recreation grounds, called Elitch's Gardens, which were then located far out of the city. To-day the residents of Denver find excellent facilities for recreation in the many parks and playgrounds maintained by the municipality. City Park has extensive zöological gardens, an aviary, and a museum of natural history, which houses the most lifelike collection of mounted animals and birds anywhere in the world. Nor are visitors to Denver neglected, a camping ground being maintained for the convenience of tourists in Overland Park, where during the summer months a temporary "tent city" springs up.

Leading out from the city are miles of good roads which take one into the heart of the scenic beauty of the West.

The thirty-nine mountain peaks, connected by one hundred miles of splendid road, are owned by Denver, which was the first city to acquire a park system outside the limits of a municipality.

Tourists discover many spots of interest near this western city. Along the twelve miles of concrete road from Denver to Golden, now a part of the Victory Highway, near the State Rifle Range, is a small, white frame dwelling, where George M. Pullman completed the invention of the railroad car bearing his name. This invention changed him from a penniless, struggling Colorado miner to a multimillionaire. Pullman came to Denver in 1860 and worked on the Gregory lode up Clear Creek.

On the top of Lookout Mountain, 7,342 feet above sea level, in a granite crypt are the graves of Colonel William F. Cody, known around the world as "Buffalo Bill," and his wife. Near by is Pahaska Tepee, an artistic memorial log museum erected by the city of Denver and given the name by which the famous scout was known to the redskins, "Pahaska" in the Indian language meaning "long hair." Here Johnny Baker, the celebrated crack shot and foster son of the Codys, has charge of the mementos of Buffalo Bill's trips around the world and of his years spent on the plains.

This Colorado city is the gateway to the rich grazing, agricultural and mining developments of the West. It is the largest manufacturing, jobbing and distribution center of the entire Rocky Mountain region. The city's chief industry is meat packing, and it does a large manufacturing business. The presence of the range country and the development of the feeding territory makes Denver a very important livestock market. Smelting and refining of lead is also an important industry. As the metropolis of Colorado, Denver is the distribution point for a large share of the metal and coal which is mined in the State, and for the sugar from the sugar-beet industry. A United States mint, which is the principal gold bullion storage house of the nation, is located here.

Situated at approximately the geographical center of transcontinental travel—1,913 miles from New York City and 1,673 miles from San Francisco—Denver enjoys excellent transportation facilities. Entering the great Union Station of this western city are the major trunk lines of seven railroad systems, as well as the mountain narrow gauge, small roads and interurbans.

The commission form of government, modified by the Speer amendment which provides for a highly centralized power, is in effect in Colorado's capital. The present mayor of the city is the Honorable Benjamin F. Stapleton. Famed for its hospitality from its earliest days, Denver is a favorite city for conventions, its yearly record being fully one hundred and fifty.

Colorado's capital is a proof that the sons of the West build well. In a little over half a century Denver has grown from a sprinkling of cabins on a far-flung frontier to a metropolis. The old paths of the fur trappers now lead through busy, modern streets, lined with magnificent buildings, and along the ox trails where the covered wagons were drawn, to-day come thundering the great transcontinental trains. Denver has been called "the city built by gold." However, it took pluck as well as gold to put this city on the map. "The Queen City of the Plains" typifies both in the traditions of a romantic past, and the assurance of a great future, the gallant spirit of the great West.

* * *

A Dash for Liberty

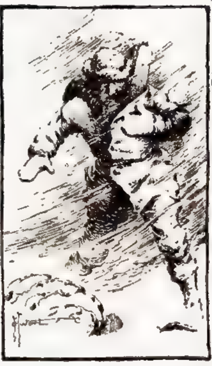
SOMETIMES in the course of the round-up, a calf will make a dash for liberty. Lack of vigilance on the part of the cow hands with regard to straying calves is apt to lead to losses of stock, especially if the calf has not been branded. In every period of the cattle industry, rustlers have been quick to take advantage of the opportunity to put their brands on the mavericks that fell into their hands, and many prosperous herds of earlier times got their start in this way. In the opinion of many cowmen, the practice was entirely legitimate, as they considered it the duty of the owner of the calf to see that it was properly branded if he expected it to be recognized and respected as his property. By failing to do this, they believed that he was guilty of culpable negligence and thereby forfeited his right to the animal. Even at the present time, cattle thieves get some of their best pickings from the stray calves that have succeeded in escaping the watchfulness of the herders at the round-up and getting away unbranded.

Besides gathering unbranded strays, some cattle thieves manage to run off a number of calves of the kind designated as "sleepers." These calves are marked with the ranch earmark before they are branded. As the earmark is a method of quick identification, riders seeking unbranded calves are likely to pass over these sleepers. Later the thief will drift off the sleeper and put his own brand on it. The importance of keeping unbranded calves under close watch at round-up time cannot therefore be overestimated.

A Wolf for Santa Claus

By
Cherry Wilson

He trusted "The Terror of the North"



WILDLY the snow beat about McLeod's store, lone outpost in that desolate Alaskan waste where trails to Nome and White Horse crossed. Yet the real storm surged in the heart of Mark Holden as he gazed into the eyes of his host, old Angus McLeod, over the open mail pouch. To get that pouch, Holden had driven thirty miles through bitter cold. For McLeod's was the nearest point at which the mail route touched Mount Hope, the orphanage Holden had established in the Yukon Hills for Indian children. He had meant to return at once. There was a reason, vital, all-compelling to him, why he must return!

Near McLeod's he had met a freighter whose dog team was exhausted by the heavy load and the storm, and, because this man was bearing supplies to an isolated camp in dire need of food, he had turned over his own dogs, sure he could obtain McLeod's for the trip home. But at the store he found that McLeod had lent his team to a trapper the week before. So here he was—stranded, afoot, with a blizzard raging, and not a dog to be had unless some one chanced that way!

For the hundredth time he went to the window and scraped away the frost, his heart sinking to note how quickly it had formed since he last looked out.

"'Tis a vain hope, Mark," remonstrated McLeod. "There'll be none so rash as to brave the trails this night. Forget the poor bairns at Mount Hope and be reconciled to spend Christmas with me. For 'tis a gloomy one I look forward to, with only yon murderer for company."

The eyes of both men turned toward the adjoining room, where "Wolf" Duprez, hated and feared through all the Yukon, was a prisoner.

"Any other time, Angus, I'd stay with pleasure," said the young man simply, "but I've made a promise and I must keep it."

"How?" McLeod asked bluntly, as a blast of wind shook the sturdy structure. "Thirty miles on foot—in that! Man, you canna do it! And you are nae God, that you can still the tempest."

"But God will bear me through it," returned Holden with quiet fervor. "Make no mistake, Angus," he added in earnest tones as he resumed his chair by the fire, "I'd not risk my life merely to get these presents through—to give the children a Christmas, though it is their first. It's something far bigger than that! I've the feeling that the way I meet this crisis means my success or failure at Mount Hope. You know the black suspicion, born of ignorance and fear, I've had to fight. You know how hard I've worked to win their trust."

"Aye, that I do!" affirmed the old Scot warmly. "And, man, I love you for it. I saw you come into the North, you and your bonny lass, foregoing a life of pleasure to do good to the most wretched of all God's creatures. Come, you did, with your pockets full of money and your heart full of high ideals. And what have you left?"

"No money, surely," admitted Holden ruefully. "But, thank God, I still have faith in my fellow man!"

"And if so, it's only because you're blind on the side your faith looks out!"

McLeod retorted. "Take Wolf Duprez. There's one to test your faith! Bad to the core, treacherous as the smile of Satan! 'The Terror of the North,' they call him."

"When do the officers come for him?" Holden was chafing to be off, but delaying departure on the bare possibility that a traveler might take shelter at McLeod's with a dog team he could borrow.

"Within the week," said the other grimly. "And glad I'll be to get rid of him. I did not relish the responsibility in the first place. But the store is handily situated on the Nome trail, and that storeroom yonder is stout as a dungeon. Often it has held prisoners before, though never a villain like Duprez. They say he is brother to the wolf. He, himself, boasts of it. Lone, these many years, he has run like the wolf, plundered like the wolf—aye, and of late, has learned to kill like the wolf. But now, thanks to the citizens of White Horse, like the wolf he is trapped."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Holden, hitching nearer the roaring Yukon stove, for the lowering cold crept in.

"Pity not him, Mark, but those he preyed on!" exclaimed Angus McLeod. "He'd be the last to thank you for it. I try not to be hard on my fellow man, but this many a month I've prayed for the day he'd be brought to justice."

"Did you know him, Angus, before he—went bad?"

"*Went* bad!" cried the old Scot, glad to take the young teacher's mind from his problem and the storm. "Mark, that one was born bad! His father was a renegade Frenchman, his mother a Cree. At three he was abandoned by both. Just such a one, Mark, as you'd have had in your mission had you come north a decade sooner. He lived like the husky then, on the fringe of the Indian camps. Faith 'tis maybe from them he learned his wolfish ways. But he throve on the bones and crusts they tossed him. Why, at seven he was such a thievin', lyin' bit of rascality that the Crees themselves kicked him out."

"Poor boy!" exclaimed Holden with swift compassion. "And then?"

"After that I heard of him frequently. He did chores for various miners from Dawson to Nome. And it was only evil I heard. Always he bit the hand that fed him. At first, you understand, in childish ways—a nugget gone from the sluice box, a grub cache rifled. At nineteen he had wormed himself into the heart of "Stikine" Charley, the finest, squarest man who ever breathed. Charley made him his partner against every one's advice. And one fall—a year back—they left to run a trap line on Lac Lemare. In the spring——"

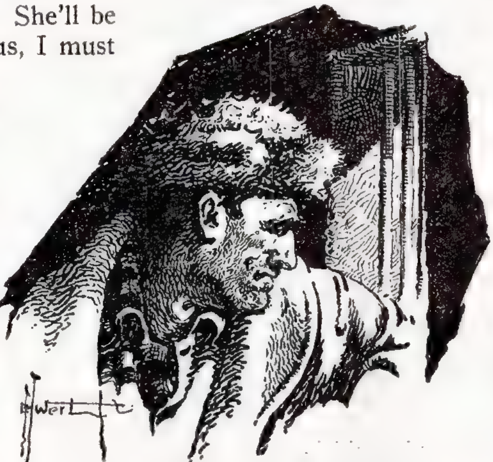
"Hark!" cried Holden, his nerves thrilling to the faint echo of a sound heard above the howling gale.

"In the spring," went on McLeod unheeding, "Duprez came back with a big catch of furs—alone! He told a cock-and-bull tale of being taken critically ill and of Charley's leaving him there to die alone. But we, who knew Charley, know he'd have never done that. He'd have stuck by his partner to the bitter end. Moreover, if he had lived, he'd have come back. Or he'd have surely sent word—for he knew the foul suspicion that fixes on a man who leaves a partner in the big snows and comes out with double profits in spring. We searched, and found the cabin burned! But in the ashes we found Charley's own match safe, and charred human bones. They swore out a warrant for Wolf Duprez then, but he got away. Since then he's been an outcast from man, preying on man. We know he robbed the government mail at Caribou, but it couldn't be proved. He's as slippery as the beast for which he's named. But last week, growing bolder, he ventured into White Horse and was nabbed. They brought him here, till the officers come from——"

"Hark!" Holden broke in tensely, gripping his friend's knees hard. "Isn't that dogs howling?"

"Aye—like lost souls!" McLeod was unperturbed. "But they're no traveler's, Mark. Only Duprez's own team, penned in the stockade without."

"A dog team!" Holden's sensitive face was a strange study of joy and reproach. "You told me there were no dogs! I've sat here, while the snow piled up, when I should have been many miles toward home. Marcie's up there alone, save for the children and old Nona. She'll be expecting me. Angus, I must take this team!"



A wild, haggard face was at the tiny opening.

McLeod's jaw dropped in sheer amazement. "Surely, man, you dinna count on *them* takin' you to Mount Hope?"

"Why not?" Holden was even more astounded than McLeod. "They're sled dogs, aren't they?"

"In the likeness." McLeod's tone was low and oddly muted. "Great, shaggy brutes, whelped in the devil's own kennels. They acknowledge no master but Wolf Duprez. Mark, 'tis uncanny the bond between them. They followed in a pack the sled that brought him—followed his voice. They would tear me to bits when I tend them, did he will it—and he would will it, only that I always have a rifle in my hand. From the window of his cell he talks to them, in a language which I—conversant with both French and Cree—do not understand. Listen! It makes my blood run cold to hear them mourning!"

"Never was sound sweeter to me!" Holden smiled and rose. "By your leave, I'll take them, Angus."

Swiftly McLeod put out a hand to stay his friend. "Don't try it, Mark! They're a vicious lot. They've a bad name in the country!"

"Which they can redeem to-night," cried the young enthusiast, "by taking the very first Christmas to Mount Hope!"

Dourly, with many a headshake, the old Scot donned his wraps, picked up his rifle from beside the door, and followed Mark Holden out into the arctic storm, muttering at every step a fervent and unheeded, "I wouldna do it, lad! I wouldna do it!"

But because he revered the self-sacrificing teacher, and could see that Holden was bent on returning, McLeod led the way to the stockade behind the store. The blizzard was attaining a greater violence. Without dogs on such a night, his friend would be doomed.

"Rope that big brute, Mark!" he roared above the wind. "The one with the white cross on his left shoulder. I judge he's the leader, and with him in harness the rest may follow."

Through the ghostly gloom Holden saw the dogs of the captive Duprez ranged beneath a rude shelter at the rear of the stockade, with the great, dark brute of the cross mark to the fore. Over the swirling snow came the fierce, low-throated growls of the outlaw pack, and through the white veil, like live coals, glowed their eyes.

Speaking softly, in a kind and soothing monotone, Mark Holden approached. The Malemute's neck hair bristled, his paws clicked with ominous rapidity, and his slitlike eyes shot flame. Without the slightest show of fear, Holden stretched out the hand that held the rope, and at that instant from above rang out a muffled scream:

"Polaire!"

Obedient to this command, the big Malemute sprang, bearing Holden down in his furious rush. In another second he would have had him by the throat, had not McLeod brought his rifle butt crashing down on the dog's nose, stunning him. Before the beast could rally from the shock, McLeod drew his friend out of the pen and slammed the gate, while Duprez screamed curses at them from the window of his cell.

"T'ief!" he cried shrilly, and now Holden glimpsed a wild and haggard face at the tiny opening. "You t'ink to lock up Wolf Duprez an' steal hees dogs. Fool! Mebbe you see now, dey nevaire leave me onless I gif de word!"

"Then," begged Holden, desperate at this failure, "in God's name, give it!"

"God?" came the mocking, mirthless laugh. "W'at do de wolf know of God?"

Convinced he could do nothing with Duprez's dogs while the man was near to set them on him, and remembering he had no right to take them, Holden silently followed McLeod back into the store. But by the set of his chin the old Scot knew he had not yet admitted defeat, that he was turning over some plan in his mind. But for moments there was no sound in the room but the shrieking gale.

"Angus," said Holden at last, "I'm sure if he'd quiet the dogs till they were in harness, I could manage them. I believe he'd do it, if you'd let me talk to him—tell him how much depends on getting these presents through."

"You may talk to him, Mark," replied the old man dubiously. "I'll not deny you that—though to my dying day I'll regret that I helped to rob you of your faith in man, for you'll lose it in that room!"

And it could only have been, as McLeod said, that Holden was blind, on the side his faith looked out.

Another man must have shrunk in horror from the wild, unkempt, and tattered figure. Leaning against the wall of his cell, Duprez glared at his visitors with hollow, glittering eyes, watching them furtively, as an animal watches its keeper. Angus McLeod, who guarded the door with his own broad back, hugged the rifle tighter in the crook of his arm and bent his finger to the trigger.

But Holden felt neither loathing nor fear, only infinite pity. This man with whom life had dealt so harshly was little more than a boy in years.

"Duprez," he began earnestly, groping for words that would strike a responsive chord in the criminal's breast, "I've come to ask a favor. It lies in your power to-night to do a great service to me and the North."

Then, while Duprez listened with sullen indifference, giving no sign that he heard, Holden told him of his refuge for Indian children at Mount Hope. With an earnestness intensely moving to Angus McLeod, he explained how he and his wife labored without renumeration, without encouragement even, content if only they could make of their charges God-fearing men and women, if only they could spare them such a childhood as Duprez had known.

"What they suffered before we came," he said with eloquence that came from the heart, "you know far better than I. For I have heard your story, and it is the echo of their own. Many were even less fortunate than you. Many are hurt in body and mind. Many have never heard a single word of love. Think, Duprez!" Mark Holden's face glowed with the pity of it, and in his earnestness he stepped nearer. "Most of them have never heard of God! And then only in curses coupled with blows—for when I spoke of Him they cringed at the name."

He paused to search, as McLeod was doing, Duprez's set and pallid face. But there was no trace of expression on it. What lay behind those locked lips, those burning eyes, neither knew, but McLeod's guess was best.

"Months ago"—and now there was frank appeal in Holden's tone—"I told them of Christ, of Christmas, and of Santa Claus who comes with his gifts of love on Christmas Eve. They did not believe. He had never come before. At last—since they have learned to trust me—they took my word for his coming. But without one sign of joy."

Feeling acutely his hearer's indifference, Holden paused again. How deeply his words were burning on Duprez's brain, he would know later!

"I asked each child," he continued, "what he wanted Santa Claus to bring. And—oh, the pity of it!—these poor little ones who have had nothing, wanted nothing. They haven't really learned to play."

Never would McLeod forget Duprez's flashing glance of hate, of unutterable contempt. He suspected then, what Holden had not dreamed—that the half-breed himself knew little of Christmas. That he could not pity others for a lack he'd never felt.

"Marcie brought them her catalogues, Duprez. They have toys pictured in them, and from the pictures we prevailed on them to make their choice. Somehow they were more sure then, and eager for Christmas. Like normal children they've counted the days. The presents, Duprez, are in the store here. They must go to Mount Hope to-night. *Must!* Else I lose the trust I've worked so hard to gain. Else"—and his voice rang vibrant in the narrow cell—"else I shake their faith in God! For, Duprez, they've confused Santa Claus with God—since Christ's birthday is the date he comes."

At the end of this speech, as Duprez guessed the favor Holden had come to ask, an indefinable change came over him. His bearing was different. He felt that he had power even in his cell.

"It was to keep their faith," Holden pleaded, "that I tried to take your dogs. In my anxiety I forgot I had no right. But you—you have only to give your word and they will obey you. Will you let me harness them, to take those toys to Mount Hope? Duprez, for the sake of those unfortunate little ones, lend me your dogs!"

Hot, appalling in its savage hate, came the outlaw's reply.

"Loan ma dogs," he lashed out, husky with passion. "Nevaire! But one master do dey know—Wolf Duprez. Dey shall know no other. But one word I gif ma dogs—to keel you if you touch dem!"

So vindictive, so absolute this refusal, that even Holden despaired of any appeal. Heartsick with failure, he turned to precede McLeod through the door. A crafty gleam lighted the prisoner's eyes.

"Wait!" he cried, and Holden swung back with a flare of hope. "How mooch do you want to tak de Chris'mas on?"

"More than life!" flashed the teacher.

"An' you?" Feverishly Duprez's eyes sought McLeod. "Does eet seem beeg to you dat leetle children keep dere God?"

"Aye, that it does!" assented McLeod hoarsely, unashamed that his eyes were wet.

"Den," proposed Duprez, eying them narrowly, "I, myself, weel take de presents t'rough! Not to save de fait'—*no!* Not because eet ees de holy night. But——"

"Why?" asked Holden breathlessly.

"Because," said Duprez, masking his eyes, "because de wolf craves freedom. I mus' breathe de open air or die. Bettair de blizzard dan de trap—even w'en de trap mus' snap again. Ma dogs go wit' me, or not at all! Dat ees ma las' word!"

Moments passed, ere Holden broke the heavy silence in the cell.

"Angus, if he won't allow the dogs to go without him, then he must go!"

"Mark," gasped McLeod, whitening, "are you daft? Him, a red murderer!"

"It's not been proved!" Holden pointed out. "The law gives every man the benefit of a doubt until his guilt is proved. Legally, he's not even under arrest. I'll be with him——"

"Do nae ask me, Mark!" pleaded McLeod, almost in terror. "For I canna do it. I canna! They trusted me to keep him safe. Any time now the officers may come for him. Do nae ask me to free the man who killed Charley! He'd kill you on the trail. I tell you, Mark, there's nae good in him!"

"There's good in any man who loves his dogs, and whose dogs love him!" cried Holden, winning by this tribute the utter hatred of Wolf Duprez, even as McLeod rose in his esteem for testifying to his badness. "And, Angus, we've got to take the chance! Listen: Only last night, I heard those poor babies talking among themselves. God was coming, they said. God would not forget them. To-night they were to place lighted candles in the window, so God could see the way. That was why God hadn't come before—there was no candlelight to guide him! Angus, dare you have it on your conscience that you killed such faith! I'm not asking you to free Duprez, but to put him on parole. I've seen the system tried, and it works. Not one man in a thousand will break a trust.

"Duprez," solemnly Mark Holden addressed the prisoner, "if I trust you to drive me to Mount Hope, will you give your word of honor to attempt no escape—to come back?"

Sullenly the half-breed answered, "You haf de word of Wolf Duprez!"

"God forgi'e me!" whimpered the devout old Scot. "But I ha' my duty!"

"You have—a high one!" declared the zealous teacher. "To God, not to man!"

"Then take him, Mark! Take him quickly," was McLeod's distracted answer, as he lowered the rifle and opened the door to freedom, "for I canna see my duty clear! But if you do nae bring him back, there'll nae be room in all the North for me to hide my head!"

While McLeod hastily put up a few provisions, lest they be storm bound on their way to Mount Hope, Holden and Duprez went for the dogs. Holden was too frantic to be off to note with what deadly severity the blizzard had increased, but, exultantly, the outlaw lifted his haggard face to the blinding snows, breathing deep the stinging breath of the storm.

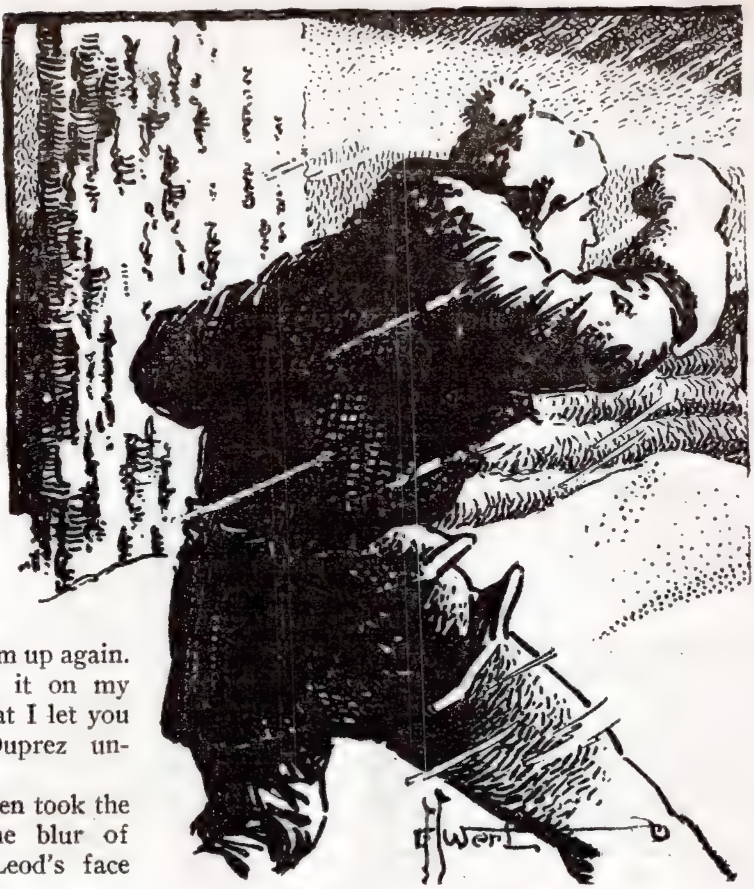
And Polaire, the big leader, leaped upon Duprez, not as on Holden, to rend and tear, but with wild caresses, while the other dogs rushed to him with a demonstrativeness unusual in the Alaskan Malemute. Holden, touched by this, felt his faith was well placed. Little did he dream that in the mind of Wolf Duprez he was already dead.

Transformed by their master's touch from an outlaw team to one docile and perfectly trained, the dogs took their places in the traces. Blackly their powerful bulk loomed against the snow; eagerly they waited their master's word. Duprez, tingling in every nerve, stood by while Holden and McLeod lashed the precious pouch of toys to the sled.

As Holden wrung the hand of his friend, who had this night proven his friendship, he felt something hard and cold thrust into his arms.

"My rifle, Mark," whispered McLeod. "Don't let it out of your hands. You're traveling with a wolf—one who already has a taste for human blood. At the first sign of treachery, shoot, and shoot to kill!"

In horror Holden pushed it back.



"A gun? No! Angus, I'm taking him on trust. A gun would make my trust a lie!"

McLeod was obdurate. Already he was blaming himself for being overruled by one whose own inherent goodness was the standard of his judgment for all men. "You've had your way in all else, Mark. Now I'll have mine! Take it, or I lock him up again. I'll nae be having it on my mind this night, that I let you go with Wolf Duprez unarmed."

Reluctantly Holden took the rifle. Through the blur of snow he saw McLeod's face working oddly.

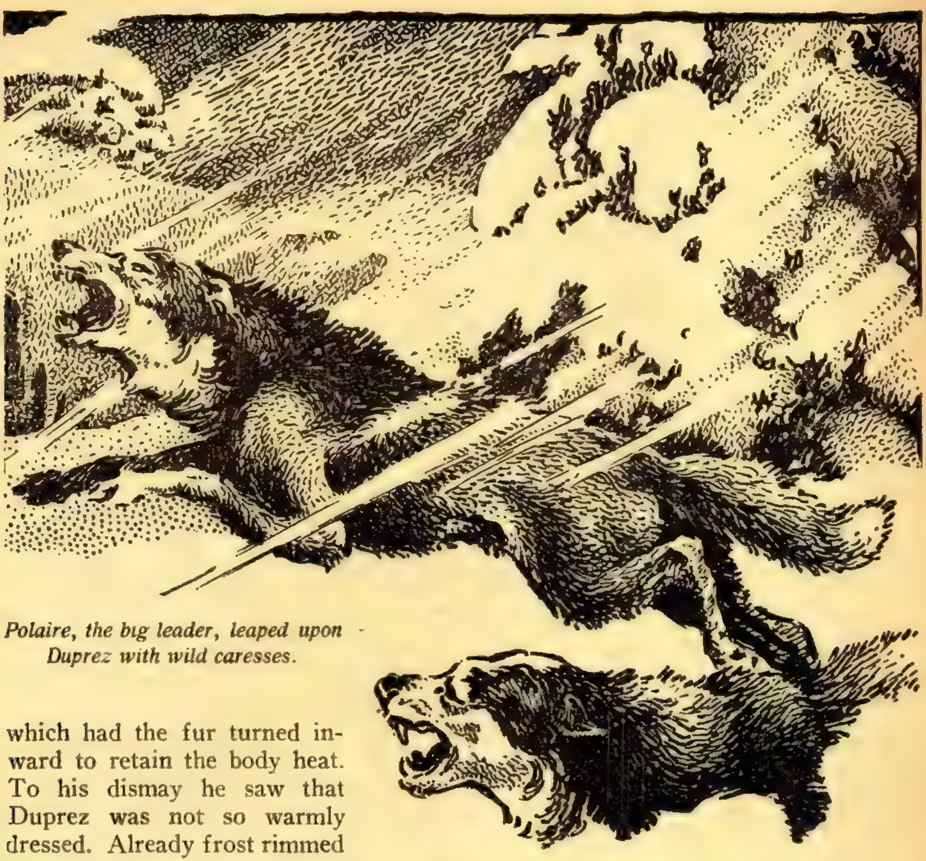
"If you do nae bring him back"—the old Scot's voice broke—"I'm a ruined man. But, Mark, if you do nae get through yoursel'—good-by!"

"Marche!" shouted Wolf Duprez. The dogs strained in the harness, the runners creaked as they broke the frost, a tidal wave of snow beat over them, and they were off!

An alleged murderer, and the most trusting, unsuspicious man in all that land, they set forth, and ere a hundred yards were passed, Mark Holden proved that his faith was no empty thing. Beneath the lashed pouch, he slipped McLeod's gun; and Duprez's sharp eyes saw, as Holden meant him to see, that the weapon was equally handy to both!

But Holden had no misgivings as they fought the drifted trail. Rather, he felt that Duprez was heaven sent. Never could he have made Mount Hope with the outlaw's dogs. He knew that now. For already in the seething whiteness, he had lost all sense of direction. It amazed him to see how unerringly the half-breed guided the team. For now and then they passed a landmark—a clump of spruce hunchbacked with wind and snow, a rise, a drop—which he recognized as being on the Mount Hope trail. And his heart warmed to the man, who—whatever his excuse—was risking so much to help him keep faith with the ill-starred children at Mount Hope.

And risk it was! Well might they perish in the storm. So bitter was the cold that it pierced even his caribou coat



Polaire, the big leader, leaped upon Duprez with wild caresses.

which had the fur turned inward to retain the body heat. To his dismay he saw that Duprez was not so warmly dressed. Already frost rimmed their brows and lashes and cracked their lips, and their labored breaths froze into frost before them!

No one, who has not lived through one, can imagine the horrible cold of an Alaskan blizzard. The cold sears the lungs like flame, and the temples throb with the pressure of it. That Duprez was enduring it because he preferred action, air, and temporary freedom to the crude comforts of his cell, Holden refused to believe. The man was good at heart, he thought, but like many of his kind shunned the appearance of good, as other men do evil.

It was a weird pilgrimage, and silent, save for Duprez's sharp, infrequent orders to his dogs, and the ever-thundering, threatening voice of the storm. At times both men broke down the snow-bound trail with their webbed shoes, that the straining dogs might follow. Sometimes, for brief stretches, both rode where wind had swept the trail snow free. Often it took their combined weight on the gee pole to keep the sled from slipping from an ice-glare into one of the numerous gorges which skirted the trail.

Then, when scarcely a third of the terrible journey was completed, Holden faltered with fatigue and cold. At Duprez's curt command he rode, while the slight, snow-sheathed figure toiled ahead.

Watching Duprez, Holden thought of the man's sordid childhood, as McLeod had told about it. A boy who lived like the veriest starving husky on the fringe of the Indian camps; who had made his way since he was seven. What wonder that the way was crooked; that it was stained with the blood of a partner slain! At Mount Hope he was coping with the same evil forces that had gone into the making of Wolf Duprez.

Babine was just such a child—Babine, whose father had been stabbed to death, and whose choice of toys had been a hunting knife! Little Fleur was blind. Tony a helpless cripple. Not one but had come to him injured in body or soul. Not one at Mount Hope who had not been utterly cast off, as Duprez had been. But it was Jasper, who was most like the man called Wolf.

Jasper was ten, and he was just learning a love for the truth. It was he who had been most skeptical, then most eager about Christmas. Music-loving Jasper, whose Christmas selection had pleased him, though it had been no toy, but a present that Holden could ill afford. No, he dared not break faith with Jasper, though he died in the——

With startling suddenness Wolf Duprez showed his hand.

Swinging abruptly, he seized Mark Holden in his arms and threw him bodily into the snow. Before the dazed teacher could struggle to his feet, the half-breed had snatched the rifle from beneath the pack and turned it on Holden with deadly aim.

"So!" he ejaculated hoarsely, with a white-toothed smile of hate. "Thees ees where de ways part. So far onlee may you go wit' Wolf Duprez! Now I leave you to de other wolves—ma brothers!"

For a full moment Holden stared at the savage face before him ere he grasped the full horror of his situation.

"My God!" he gasped, and it was no curse. "You're not leaving me here to die?"

"To die?" Duprez shrugged. "Not eef you can fin' de way back to McLeod's—wit' de trail snowed over an' night come on. Ten miles eet ees—for here ees de Leetle Porcupine. I gif you dat chance, which ees more dan ees gif to me."

"But I trusted you!" Holden faltered, aghast at this perfidy. "You gave your word!"

"Ma word!" indescribable the bitterness and scorn his tone conveyed. "I gif you de word of Wolf Duprez—an' w'at ees dat? Ask any man. No man tak' ma word!"

"I took it!" groaned Holden, helpless to do more than plead before the unswerving aim of that gun. "Don't break it, Duprez, and shake my faith in you, as you will shake those children's faith in God!"

"Ees eet so bad," was the mocking retort, "to lose de fait' in God? Me? I haf none! W'at haf God to do wit' Wolf Duprez? But you—you want somet'ings! You want ma dogs—ma dogs, who believe me even w'en I do not call on God. Ma word eet haf no value—so I gif eet. Fool! To t'ink de beast once free weel return to de trap!"

Still speaking he backed toward the sled. Desperate, at thought of being left to perish horribly in that swirling immensity of snow, Holden rushed. Instantly the rifle roared and a bullet clipped his coat.

"Hold!" cried Duprez, fire leaping to his eyes, as speech gushed hotly to his lips. "I want not to keel you wit' de shot. I want you to feel de col', I, all ma life, haf known! For I hate all mans, and I hate you mos'. You—you talk de lie, trus', honair, God! One man talk to me lak dat. One man I luf——" and, somehow, Holden knew it was of his dead partner, Stikine Charley, that he spoke. "I luf heem, lak God. He t'row me down—lak God!

"Dey say"—and the half-breed went on—"dey say I keel heem! Dey say I am brother to de wolf. Dat mak' me proud. De wolf he not lie! He hate man! *Bon jour,* monsieur! Mebbe you meet heem to-night an' know dat ees true. Mebbe you know den—*dere ees no good in Wolf Duprez!*"

"There is!" screamed the doomed man, as criminal and dogs vanished in the gloom. "There is, and God will find it! Duprez, I'll be praying that—praying till I die!" But only the echo of a mirthless laugh came back.

And often from Duprez's stiff lips issued that joyless laugh, as he forged ahead of the great brute, Polaire. Good in *him!* God—if there was a God, and he was at all concerned with Wolf Duprez—knew just how bad he was. How proud he was of being bad. To his bad name he owed all the respect of man he'd ever gained. Once, when his only crimes had been to lie and steal for food, man had given him only abuse. Now, when he was known as the man who killed his partner, they were not so handy with kicks and taunts. There was fear in their eyes when they looked at him.

Man had even helped him to get his bad name. Whatever evil thing was done from Dawson to Nome, he, Duprez, had done it. Well, that was as he wished it. Wait till they heard of this thing he had done to-night. When the missioner died back there, praying so foolishly, they would give him a name so black that the one before would be white beside it. To kill the man who trusted him!

"Fool!" he voiced aloud his bitter contempt for that trust. "To t'ink I haf de pity in ma heart to suffer dat leetle children may haf de playt'ings—de Chris'mas. Bah!"

Now he was free, he would stay free, though all the North rose up against him. For who knew the North as he—brother to the wolf? He would stay on the Mount Hope trail—as he had planned in those silent miles with Holden—till he came to his cache on the Beaverkill. Since man had hunted him, it had been necessary to establish many such caches. Traveling afar, where he was not known, he would buy food and then store it, safe from animals and man.

He had taken a chance at White Horse, and had been caught. Some one had whispered his name in the store, and a dozen men had pounced on him, taking him to McLeod's. He would no longer risk a land where he was known. From his cache on the Beaverkill, he would strike off into the wildest North, up on the Colville, and he would come back no more.

So, toiling still on the Mount Hope trail, he blessed the storm that imperiled him, because it would hide his tracks—and hide the missioner, praying back there this Christmas eve.

Christmas! *He* knew about Christmas, for had he not seen one? That was the awful winter when St. Mary's Mission took him in. He was fifteen then. But he could remember it now! This gnawing pain in his legs, this numbness that made his feet like clods of ice, the angry storm, brought it all back. He could see the little log chapel, so warm, with candles flickering—candles that must not go out, for this was the night when angels kept their vigil. Those candles had seemed so desirable to him. If only he had a holy candle for himself, he might always be warm and cozy, he had thought, for God would not forget him while He could see its light! He had taken one—from before the very altar! And a sob died on Duprez's lips, as if now, years later, he felt again the anguishing consequences of that act.

The squaw who kept the mission clean had seen, and had driven him out into the storm—like this storm to-night. But then he had been so little, weak and sick. *Mon Dieu!* He would have died, but that a miner found him on the trail and took him home to thaw him out. So this, too, was the eve of Christmas, when the holy angels watched!

Were they watching him, he wondered, as he lifted his gaunt and weary face to the skies. Had they seen him leave the missioner in the snow? *Diable!* He was getting simple, like that boy he had been. It must be the cold, the great tiredness. Well, he was very near his cache which was in a big, dry cave. Then he would rest, build a fire, and get warm. He would warm his hands and throw off the bulky mail sack. Till then his dogs must pull it, for his fingers were too numb to untie it, and he had no knife to cut the thongs.

Playthings! That was what the sack contained. That was what the foolish missioner would brave death to get to Mount Hope. It was for these playthings that the little ones were watching now, thinking that God was bringing them. Foolish ones! To think God cared for them!

He had seen playthings, too, those of the miners' girls and boys. One, he remembered a small violin. How he had longed to play on it! The ache of that longing was with him yet—had ever been. He had stolen that violin, and for an hour it had been wholly his. He had made music on it, music that melted his heart and flowed out along the strings. Had it really been so wonderful, that music?

But—as with the candle—he had been caught. The dog whip—A-ah! The smart of that beating he could feel yet; the scars of it would never go. But it had been worth it—that hour with the violin!

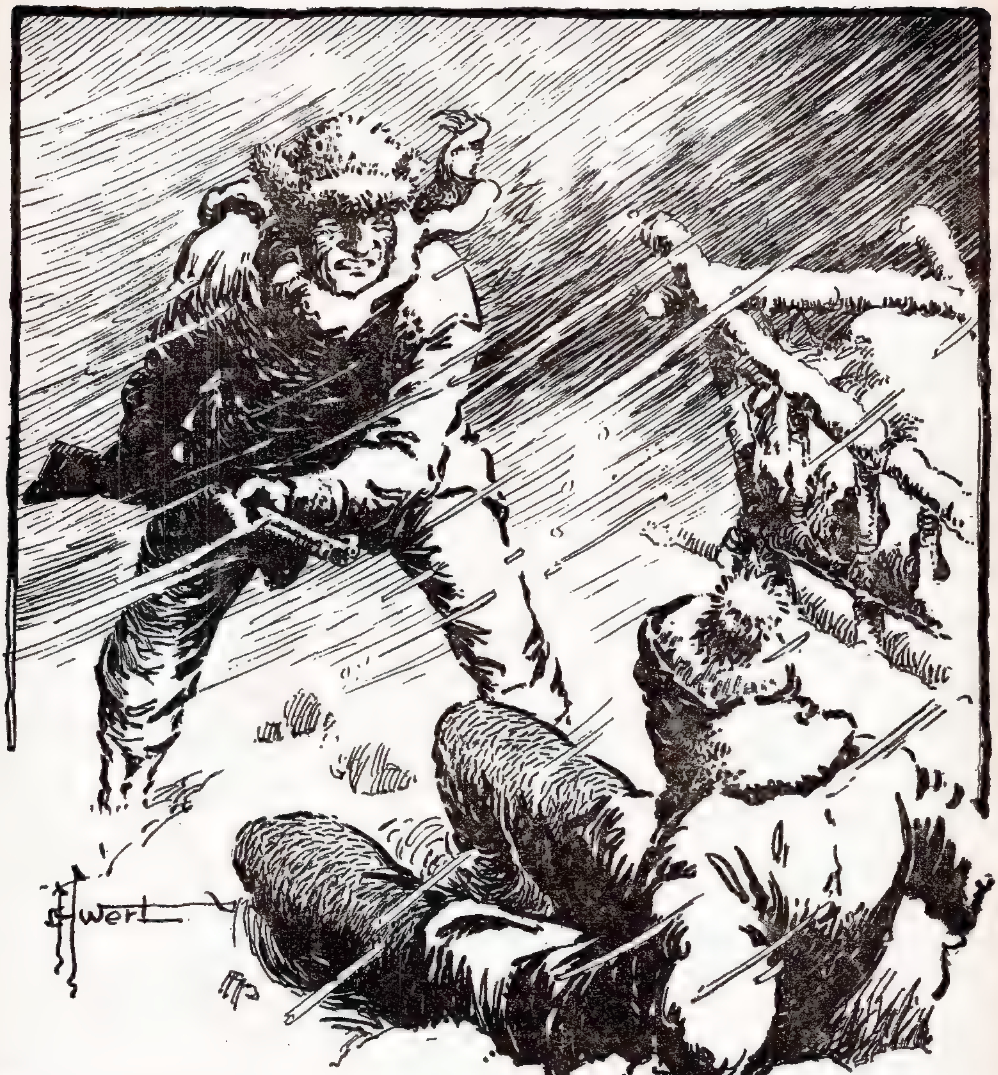
Arrived at the Beaverkill, where he would leave the Mount Hope trail, Duprez first assured himself that his cache was intact; that there was food enough, with what was on the sled, to see him through. Then, while the exhausted dogs lay panting in harness, watching him with faithful eyes, he tore dead limbs from the tree, cleared away the snow with his webbed shoes, and made a fire. Over it he bent, rubbing his frosted hands. Before he made tea and rested, he must untie the mail sack and bury it in the snow. Maybe then he could forget it, forget the missioner praying, praying till he died, that God might find the good in him that would make him carry the playthings to Mount Hope!

Untieing the thongs that lashed it to the sled, he lifted the pouch in his arms to throw it from him. But all its amazing contents showered to his feet, and he sprang back in awe, fearful, somehow, lest they touch him! For Holden had opened the pouch at the store and unwrapped each toy, to be sure all were there, so that no child would be disappointed. He had returned them in that state, and not even bothered to re-tie the bag, merely taking a half hitch about its throat with the rope that bound it to the sled.

For a long time Duprez stared, while Polaire growled at the strange array that caused his master fear. Then in the outlaw was born a great curiosity for these things one man had deemed so precious.

Under the arctic sky this man who was only a boy in years, but aged in sin, fed the flaring fire and squatted by it, gathering the playthings to him. A wild, eerie figure, with his long, black locks, his pallid face, and the childish toys. A wild setting—the frozen land, the lawless storm, the big, wolfish Malemutes looking on with curious eyes and lolling tongues.

Dolls, beads, all such trinkets, he held to the light, admired a moment, and laid aside. Longer he lingered over a chest of toy tools. Babine's hunting knife he pocketed gratefully. Amused by the rollicking lines of a teddy bear, he snatched it up, starting violently as it emitted an unmistakable *"Woof!"* By experiment, he found that this phenomenon was due to the pressure of his finger on its breast, and the grimness of his face relaxed as he made the little beast grunt again and again.



For a full moment Holden stared at the savage face before him ere he grasped the full horror of his situation.

The bear held his interest until he saw the long ears of a rabbit sticking from the snow. The rabbit was cotton, and had a bulb and string attached. Growing wise now in the ways of toys, he pressed the bulb, and the rabbit gave a comical hop that made Wolf Duprez laugh—his first genuine laugh in years. Ah, but they were fun, these things to make the play!

Greedily he looked around for more. His eyes were attracted to a case, and, as he lifted it, the mirth died out of his face and ineffable awe came to it. His fingers shook, and his whisper was more like a strangled sob.

"Mon Dieu! Le violon!"

Reverently he lifted Jasper's violin from its case. Trembling, he tucked it under his chin against the tattered neck of his caribou coat. With quivering fingers he lifted the bow to the strings.

The supreme, unsatisfied longing of his life was to be fulfilled. He would have a violin of his own, to play when he willed!

His heart stood still as he drew the bow across the strings, gently, but firmly, with the touch of the born musician, so that there was no rasp, but a sad, sweet, prolonged wail, at which Polaire pointed his slender nose to the frozen skies, howling mournfully. Duprez stood enraptured; he was hearing the celestial music of the spheres. Great sobs shook him, and he pressed his gaunt cheek to the instrument on his breast.

"I mak eet!" he sobbed. "I mak eet—de museek of *de violon!*"

A frenzy now possessed him to be away. Away where he could rest and play—play for hours, lure from out his heart the songs that all his life had lain there. He could not play here—the angels were watching. They knew the violin was not his, but another's. It was meant for a boy, such as he had been. And the playthings—so cunning, so funny—he could not leave them in the snow!

One by one he returned the toys to the sack—all but the violin. That he buttoned inside his coat, right against his beating heart. Then he threw the sack on the sled and spoke to the dogs who got up stiffly.

In his mad haste to be off, he forgot the food from his cache. Forgot he was famishing and freezing; for the hunger in his soul was satisfied; his cold heart was warmed. This exaltation lifted him up, carried him along, so that for a time he almost ran, though his snowshoes sank ankle deep at every step.

All his life he had longed for this thing. Now he had it. He must keep it! If only he could have had it years ago, all would have been so different. His heart told him that. He wouldn't have minded the cold and hunger. He wouldn't have been lonely—ever. To be brother to the wolf—what was that? What did the wolf know of the violin? Awhile with it, and maybe—as the missioner was praying—God would find some good in him. Then he thought, with swift and paralyzing shock, that the missioner was *not* praying, but lying dead in the snows—to be found by the wolves!

The weight of that thought dragged at his feet, bringing the old weariness back a hundredfold. He swayed weakly in his tracks, and only his will upheld him. For this thing against his heart, which had the tongue of angels—he could make no music on it now. All he could bring to it, to give it voice, would be the dying missioner's prayers. The songs in his heart were evil songs! How could he put them on the violin?

"Eet would be bad!" he moaned, in his soul's stark despair. "Bad—lak w'en I steal de blessed candle!"

For to Wolf Duprez the violin was a sacred thing, and to take it was sacrilege. Grief battered down his strength as could no toil or cold.

Suppose he went back for the missioner? Could he make music then? But then he would go to jail for killing Charley. Then he would have no violin. Anyhow, it was too late—the missioner was dead. He, who was born to the blizzard, knew that. To be lost for hours without food or fire was to die!

His staggering step, his swimming vision, warned Duprez that he himself must have fire, food, and rest. Well, he was far enough from the main trail to camp with safety. But his eyes, straining to peer through the snow, identified a cluster of spruce bowed under their ghostly burden. A terrible realization made him all but collapse. Back there at the Beaverkill, he had forgotten to leave the Mount Hope trail!

How far had he come? Ten, eleven, slow and awful miles! A great awe came upon him that he could forget.

Was it God leading him, leading him to Mount Hope? Had God found use for Wolf Duprez? No; it had been his own joy and grief over the violin. He couldn't cross the hills here. He must fight on through another mile of snow. Then he would turn off toward the Colville, and there camp and thaw out his frozen blood. But now, trudging wearily, he fancied eyes were upon him, scorning him—*all-seeing* eyes!

"Crazee!" he muttered, ridiculing such a fancy. "Crazee—an' mebbe a leetle seeck!"

He had never been really strong since the night when the awful sickness came upon him in the little cabin on Lac Lemare, when Charley left him there to die. He had been out of his head that night, but he'd known Charley was going. He had pleaded with him to stay, not leave him there to die alone. Much that went on in his mind then was due to the sickness, but *that* was real—like his pleading to the empty room for water, for death!

Charley had made him his partner when men said he was no good. Charley he had loved and trusted. To Charley he had talked out his heart. That year in the little cabin—it had been heaven. All of heaven possible for Wolf Duprez. For when Charley deserted him, he hated all men. In this hate, he had killed the missioner. And now he could not play the violin, the violin he was stealing, the violin for which a boy was waiting.

At a sudden thought, Duprez caught his breath sharply. He stood still, regardless of the terrible cold that made inaction synonymous with death. He did not notice the driving wind that pierced his clothing, pitifully worn and thin, and chilled the frail form beneath. For to Wolf Duprez, a boy in years, a child in mind, thought came hard. The idea that had come to him now was soul-shaking in its magnitude. This boy who waited, who counted the days before Christmas, when the violin did not come, would he lose his faith in man? Would he maybe sin so big—as he, Duprez, had done—that all his songs would die?

Ah, the pity of that! Yes, *this* he could pity. This he could understand, the heart hunger for the violin. The great heart hurt when they had torn from *him* the one that had been but an hour his! What pain of cold, or hunger, or abuse could equal that? And now this anguished thought that the instrument he held against his heart had come too late. And the boy—he still could sing! That boy would suffer, as he had suffered—the good God forbid!

Standing there in the torturing cold that made every breath a knife thrust, Duprez felt his brain on fire. So hot was it that the memory of Holden's words became confused. To him it was not the toys that must go through, but the violin, else a boy would become another Wolf Duprez, whose only music was a dead man's prayers. To prevent this, the violin must beat the Christmas! Christmas came with the dawn, and the dawn was near.

Suddenly, a great anxiety came upon him. It was as if he was that boy who waited. His eagerness outstripped his strength, pitching him head foremost in the snow. But he was careful, even in falling, to protect the violin. Stiffly, painfully, he struggled to his knees.

"We go, Polaire," he moaned through black, drawn lips, as the big leader whined softly, "to breeng *le violon!* Blessed angels, watch!"

It was the first great sacrifice of Wolf Duprez. Deliberately he made it, knowing that without food and rest, he was more likely to find death than to reach Mount Hope; knowing that he would lose freedom, the dogs he loved, and, irrevocably, the violin. But there was compensation. For now, bending his tired body to the devastating storm, he felt, comfortingly, an unseen gaze upon him. Angel eyes! And now they smiled on Wolf Duprez!

God had found use for him! No bodily torment could rob him of his fierce pride in that. It was so sweet to be of use. To be a partner with God! But he must fight off this numbness, this wish to sleep. He must not ride, or he would sleep and never wake. He must walk, agonizing steps, while the thumping of his breast was tearing his heart to pieces under the violin. No one knew how all his life he had wanted a violin—no one but Charley. Charley had left him to die—and his songs were dead.

Then his brain grew too numb even to wander. Only an undying instinct kept him in the trail. Often he fell in the snow to lie, still as death, till the voice of Polaire, the big Malemute roused him from his dangerous slumber.

The fear that he might not beat the dawn kept him in motion; helped him to fight off the blackness which was closing in. Then, when he could fight no more, a light pierced the blackness, a light from a candle. It was placed in a window—to light the way for God!

Toward it he groped, sobbing at his lack of strength. He was sure that—as on that night at Lac Lemare—his brain was playing tricks. For traveling with him was a ghost of the snows—the missioner—taunting him with soft, damning words of praise! He was sick, dying—but Charley had not left him! Charley was there, with his strong arms about him, carrying him along, helping him—into the candlelight!

"I breeng eet!" he breathed rapturously as the blackness shut down. "I breeng eet—*le violon!*"

In spite of pain, Wolf Duprez almost believed that he had won heaven after all. For the room in which he lay, propped up on pillows, was so beautiful, so full of peace and warmth. There was living green in every nook and cranny, and in the big hall beyond, which echoed to childish laughter, a great spruce shone with a thousand candles. And a woman—a woman with the face of an angel—was bending over Wolf Duprez! While the missioner, very much alive, and smiling, was bringing a hot drink for him. But a man stepped out from behind his couch, taking the cup from the missioner's hands, a big, black-bearded, frank-faced man—Stikine Charley!

"Come, drink this, son!" rumbled that husky, hearty voice Duprez had loved. "'Twill make you strong."

Duprez's soul yearned toward that voice, but pride forbade, and he drew back, his dark, wild eyes stricken.

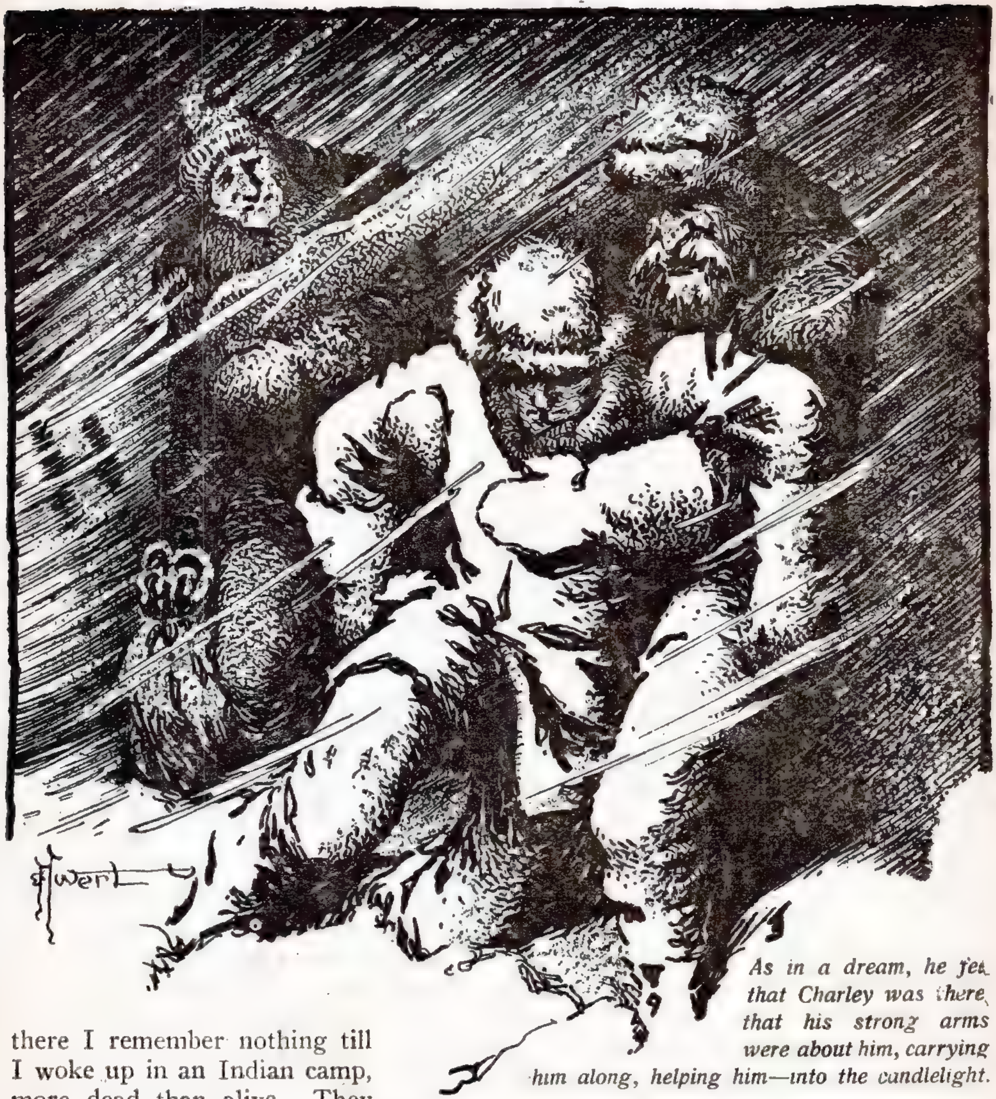
"W'at you care—if I am strong?" he asked bitterly. "You, who leave me to fight de seeckness, to die alone!"

Tears stood in Stikine Charley's eyes as he set down the cup, and, kneeling by the couch, he took Duprez's hands in both his own.

"God knows I didn't mean to, son!" he said earnestly. "I left you to get help. For I was coming down with the sickness, too! There was just one other trapper that side of Lac Lemare—Alec Gravier, remember, son? So I started off to get Alec, though I was pretty shaky for such a trip—twenty miles through mush, snow, and ice. I found Alec dead in his bunk. He had been dead for days. I thought then that the plague had hit us. Half out of my head with fever, panicky with remembering the horrors of a former plague, I did what the law of the wilderness required—I burned the cabin!"

Utterly oblivious of Holden and his wife, intensely interested in his grim tale, Stikine Charley sought only to make his old partner understand. For he knew the limitations, the possibilities of Wolf Duprez as no other man knew them, or had cared to know.

"I started back to you then, but from



As in a dream, he felt that Charley was there, that his strong arms were about him, carrying him along, helping him—into the candlelight.

there I remember nothing till I woke up in an Indian camp, more dead than alive. They said I'd been sick for weeks. The spring floods had cut off Lac Lemare, so they couldn't take me home; but carted me south to Sutter's Fort, for which they were heading when they picked me up. There I lay, flat on my back, for many months. 'Twas influenza we had, son, and that and exposure—anyhow, the minute I got on my feet again, I started home, working my way down the Skeena to Prince Rupert, where I caught a boat to Nome, and set out to hunt you up."

"At White Horse they told me you'd been jailed for my murder!" Duprez thrilled to the flashing anger in Charley's eyes. "I guess I made the air pretty blue. Maybe I was too rough on them. For they'd found the cabin I burned, and thought it ours. From that, and the match safe which I must have dropped there and poor Alec's remains, they made out their case."

Quickly he told how he'd borrowed the best dogs the remorseful camp could offer and raced to McLeod's, only to find Duprez had just left with Holden. He'd followed close on their trail, picking up Holden, and overtaking Duprez at the very portals of Mount Hope.

"That's my story," he finished simply. "Will you take it—on faith? Will you be a partner with me again?"

To be Charley's partner once more! Duprez's fierce joy was equaled only by the misery that came in its train. *"Mon Dieu!* You haf come back too late!" Tragically, he turned away his face. "For I am bad lak dey say. I mak for keel de missioner! God did not let heem die. But me—I did not go back!"

"You would have, had God willed it," said Mark Holden gently. "But He had a higher use for you. Duprez, you've made it possible for me to do big things here. This Christmas has drawn me nearer the hearts of the children than all the time before. To show my thanks, and because it is Christmas, I'm giving you what Charley tells me you have most desired, a violin. Not the one you brought—but my own!"

Duprez's eyes closed. They thought he was sleeping. How restful that sleep seemed. For the weariness, the white misery was gone from his face now, and in its stead was only infinite peace.

But he was not asleep. His eyes were closed, that he might better listen to the mad, sweet song of his heart—a song he could put on the violin!

How the S. S. *Ohio* Loaded For the Klondike

By A. W. Anderson McCulley

WHEN the Klondike gold discoveries were made back in 1897 the wildest kind of excitement swept the waterfront of Seattle. The following spring men were pouring in from all parts of the United States, Canada, and even Europe, demanding transportation to the new rainbow's end. Seattle at that time was not a great world port. She had a few steamers that had been used on the quiet inland waters of Puget Sound, and a few more that had been brought up from the Columbia River. The sailing clippers of the lumber trade made her a port of call, but there weren't many other ships, as the trip to Skagway is a tortuous rock-bound passage, and was utterly unsuitable for a full-rigged sailing vessel. Furthermore, these gold seekers were in a hurry, each man feeling he had to beat every other man on the dock to the spot.

Grim tragedies resulted. They tell the tale of three old inland steamers with petrified bottoms that had been tied up for twenty years. They were sent up that rock-bound coast, loaded down with human freight. Sleeping space on the narrow decks measured off to just what a man actually would occupy, and was sold for fabulous prices. Needless to add, these boats never reached their destination. Tug boats carried as many men as they could on the long storm-swept trip. Some of them arrived.

Then what seemed a real boat started. The S. S. *Ohio,* needless to say, sold out to the last inch of space. Men left their outfits behind because they could get only themselves transported, on this mad excursion into the frozen north.

At Skagway they left the steamers and took the White Horse trail into the interior. The sides of that grim trail bore mute evidence of the mad folly of the great gold lust. Pack horses without fodder perished by the way, packs were abandoned when men became too weak to carry them, men themselves perished because they had no packs—and a few brought back gold.

It was a strange land.

Photo by Dane Coolidge

The Man I Killed

A Modern Midas

by Albert William Stone

I NEVER expected to tell this story to any living person. I have just been looking at the picture of "Happy" Dayton again. It reveals him dressed in the rough clothing of an outdoor man—clothing bought at some rude frontier store for twice what it was actually worth, but cheap enough, even at that. Cotton shoddy, it was, with a "hickory" shirt open at the throat, sans collar, sans necktie, and with a wrinkled vest hanging loose at the buttons. And after all these years I can remember that Happy Dayton wore corduroy trousers stuffed into low leather boots, although the photograph does not show them.

Happy's hair is touseled in the picture, escaping under the edges of his big, battered miner's hat, for miners did not see a barber very often in the days that the picture was taken. It was just a tintype. I speak of it in the past tense; you will soon know why. It was a battered affair that looked strangely out of place in my luxurious surroundings, for I am what the world calls a very rich man.

Four of the banks of this city have my name upon their lists of directors. My cash balance is probably one of the largest in America. I have a weakness for cash and negotiable securities, such as government bonds. I live in a house at the crest of a high knoll, from where I can see in any direction. Some of the Sunday papers have referred to it as "Cole's private jail," although why they should liken it to a jail is more than I can tell you. It may be that it looks like such an institution from a distance, most of my windows being barred. Rich men must look out for themselves and for their wealth. "King" Cole, they call me. You see, I am regarded as a king of finance. When I fare forth I ride in a magnificent car, with a liveried chauffeur at the wheel and another liveried servant riding beside me. I am worth, in round numbers—but there! This constant temptation to tell the world the extent of my wealth is another of my weaknesses. Sometimes, I am called upon to give out interviews for the papers and magazines, usually on the subject of my success. The world believes me successful. But if the world only knew!

I have looked at Happy Dayton's photograph a thousand times in the last twenty years. And when I gaze into that frank, laughing countenance, and remember what I left back there in the desert that long time ago, a sort of dry shudder goes through me. Successful? How can a man be successful if he is miserable, with the stark misery of self-accusation? When I look at Happy, there can be no pretense between us, for Happy *knows*. I can see it in his eyes, in those laughing blue eyes, so full of loyalty to the man who repaid it by——

But the time has come for me to tell the world about it. I am an old man. My eyes, set too close together for strict beauty, have a tired expression. My mirror tells me that. My hair, brushed so carefully every morning and evening by my personal attendant, is thin and white. And my hands bear the signs of age despite all the efforts of my manicure to drive them back; while my figure, far from being heavy as is the case with so many men past middle life, is thin to the point of emaciation.

The time is fast approaching when I must leave all luxury behind. My ocean-going yacht will be in the possession of some one else. My doctor, a specialist whom I retain at fifty thousand a year, cannot help me. My palatial home with its priceless paintings and tapestries, its period furniture, its profusion of antique rugs, its matchless library, will be dismantled and its treasures distributed far and wide. All that can be done to remind posterity of the wealth I amassed will be to build a mausoleum at a cost of a million or so, and place my wretched remains within it.

"Ah, Happy!" I muttered two or three days ago as I gazed at the picture, "if you were only here, and there were not that—thing—between us, what a difference in everything!" For Happy Dayton never cared about money, as I did. All my vast wealth would mean nothing to such a man.

We met in Denver, Happy and I, in the days when the first railroad train to enter that frontier town was still a green and vivid memory, and when the whistle of the locomotive was always the signal for a rush to the depot. Many of the buildings, even on the main street, were of logs. Jackson's discovery of gold in Clear Creek had brought the rush that might have been expected. And the advance upon the Pikes Peak region was yet in full tide, so life in Denver was a reckless, joyous, devil-may-care experience from day to day, and from night to night.

It was in a Larimer Street gambling house that I encountered Happy Dayton. He had been playing poker with some men whose skill far outmatched his own, and who had no scruples whatever at cheating. Probably the cards in this particular game were marked; I don't know. Anyway, just as I strolled in the direction of the crowd about the table I saw a young man, whose back was to me, spring to his feet. There was a gun in a leather holster at his side; his hand fell on the butt.

"You——"

That was as far as he got. There was a crack, and he staggered backward, clutching at his shoulder. A white-faced, beetling-browed fellow on the other side of the table was crouched over its edge, an expression of such cold ferocity on his face that I wondered he had not shot to kill, instead of merely to wound. "Don't ever try to draw on me!" he said between his teeth, "unless you want to make a mighty quick trip out of this life. Now fade away before I drill you between the eyes!"

The young fellow was still clutching at his wounded shoulder, pale even to the back of his neck. At the crack of the gambler's gun a sudden hush had fallen over the motley assemblage in the saloon—red-shirted mining men, Indians, half-breeds, trappers and scouts, merchants who had come West to take a chance, hangers-on and whatnot. There was death in the air.

I had been on the frontier long enough to imbibe some of its spirit. There are worse things than being killed by a bullet, a fact which the frontiersman is not long in sensing. Personal bravery is not at all uncommon; it is, in fact, the usual thing. And already I had learned a thing or two about so-called bad men.

I caught the young fellow in the crook of my left arm as he was about to say something that would, without doubt, have ended his career then and there. With my right hand I drew my own revolver, a long-barreled affair with a wooden handle and a curved bore like a rifle's. My movements were necessarily quick; and before the gambler could divine my intention I had him effectively covered.

"Shove that pile of cash and chips over to this side of the table," I ordered, my eye squinting coldly along the barrel of my weapon. "And drop that gun before you do it."

The gambler's black eyes held to mine for the double tick of a watch. Then, with a smothered oath, he dropped his gun. It fell to the surface of the table, a distance of some two inches. I watched him like a cat as he pushed the money across the table. The silence in the room had communicated itself to the line standing three deep at the bar, and even to the dance hall adjoining. The music of the scraping fiddle had stopped.

"I won it fairly," he muttered out of the side of his thin-lipped mouth.

"You never played fairly in your life," I retorted, for I knew him by sight and reputation. It was "Black Jack" Cannon, who had killed a score of men. And I rather gloried in thus having the drop on so notorious a character. "Now get up from that chair and back out of here. Keep your hands up, too." He had raised them the moment he had pushed the money across the table. "One move I don't like, and you'll never play another hand, or rob another tenderfoot," I added.

Meantime I was holding the wounded boy in the crook of my left arm. Black Jack Cannon rose and obeyed my command to the letter. He backed across the room, the crowd making way for him, while I held a steady bead upon him. Then he went through the side door of the hall, and the darkness swallowed him.

There is a peculiar psychology in affairs of the sort I have just described. One not used to frontier life might think that the man I had vanquished would thereafter be waiting to ambush me. But Black Jack Cannon knew better than to do such a thing. After the public exhibition I had made of him he would simply be nominating himself the guest of honor at a necktie party, and he knew it, so he was not seen in Denver again.

Happy Dayton was young and healthy,

and the wound in his shoulder did not prove serious. I called at his shack to see him every day, and the friendship between us grew. The boy's regard for me was little short of worship. He was that kind. My rescue of him had been more spectacular than otherwise; but from his subsequent treatment of me you would have thought that I was a hero. He certainly thought so.

It was not surprising, therefore, that, when I proposed a partnership in a prospecting trip up Clear Creek Cañon, he should have accepted with every indication of joy. We outfitted ourselves with burros, provisions, tools, and the like, and, after several days' tramp up the cañon, located a claim. We worked it, with indifferent success, most of the summer.

I had more than one chance to observe the character of my partner's loyalty, while in the cañon. There was the time, for instance, when three claim jumpers crept up while I was sleeping, all ready to kill me and take possession of the claim we had been at such pains to develop. The country was full of desperate men, to whom human life meant a little less than nothing, so long as it was not their own.

It was early in the morning, and my partner had gone down to the creek to get some water for our breakfast coffee. The jumpers crept upon the camp from the shelter of a granite boulder just as Happy, his mouth all pursed for the whistle he luckily did not sound, started to scramble up the hill. The tumbling of the creek among its boulders drowned out the noise of his approach. The jumpers neither saw nor heard him.

Two of them he wounded with his first brace of shots. The third wheeled and fired at him point-blank, getting the boy through the fleshy part of the right leg—a superficial wound that heeled quickly. The next instant, his own bullet had pierced the outlaw's heart, causing instantaneous death. The body rolled nearly into the creek before it lodged against a stone.

The two wounded men were cursing wickedly. The shots had aroused me, and I was sitting up in my blankets, still dazed with sleep. Had Happy not fired when he did I should have been dead. It was the way of claim jumpers in those lawless days.

I was for dispatching the two wounded men, for, I dare say I was a hard man even then. But Happy would not hear of it.

"They're helpless, Cole," he reminded me. "You'd never kill a helpless man, and you know it. We'll take 'em to Golden City where they can have medical attention."

And that is precisely what we did, despite my protests. The two outlaws subsequently recovered and lived to die at the hands of others. At any rate, the circumstance serves to illustrate the kind of man I had for a partner—a partner who fairly worshiped me because I had happened to save his own life and money in a moment when the fancy struck me to play the hero!

The working of a gold mine claim was no sinecure in those early days, but, on the contrary, represented hardship in every sense of the word. All summer, we toiled on the side of the slope, taking out the rock and pulverizing it with our hammers to pan out the few flakes of gold, for there were no rock crushers available as yet. We had little money, and the food we were able to buy was the coarsest and simplest. On more than one occasion, we were on short rations; and this did not tend to increase my good nature, never too apparent at the best of times.

A born adventurer, Happy Dayton, at length, proposed that we tear up stakes and travel for the desert country in the far Southwest, a section wilder at the time even than it is to-day, and three times as dangerous for a tenderfoot. The desert, we had heard, contained vast quantities of gold, to be taken for the asking.

"It will be a dangerous trip," I demurred, "and a long ways from supplies."

"We'll take enough provisions to last us," Happy replied. "And if we run short we can go on half rations. Why, Cole, it will be worth the hardship and risk—to find some of the gold that there is in that country! We'll be rich!"

I was willing enough to be rich, but was skeptical of Happy's proposal for achieving the desired state. Nevertheless, I consented. The desert was a hard place, I knew, as the picked bones of hundreds of luckless adventurers before us testified; but if Happy could stand it, I reasoned, I could. I would chance the danger of dying from thirst, the bites of rattlers, tarantulas, scorpions, and Gila monsters, the risk of getting lost and all the rest of it. Gold lay hidden in the fastnesses of the desert. Gold!

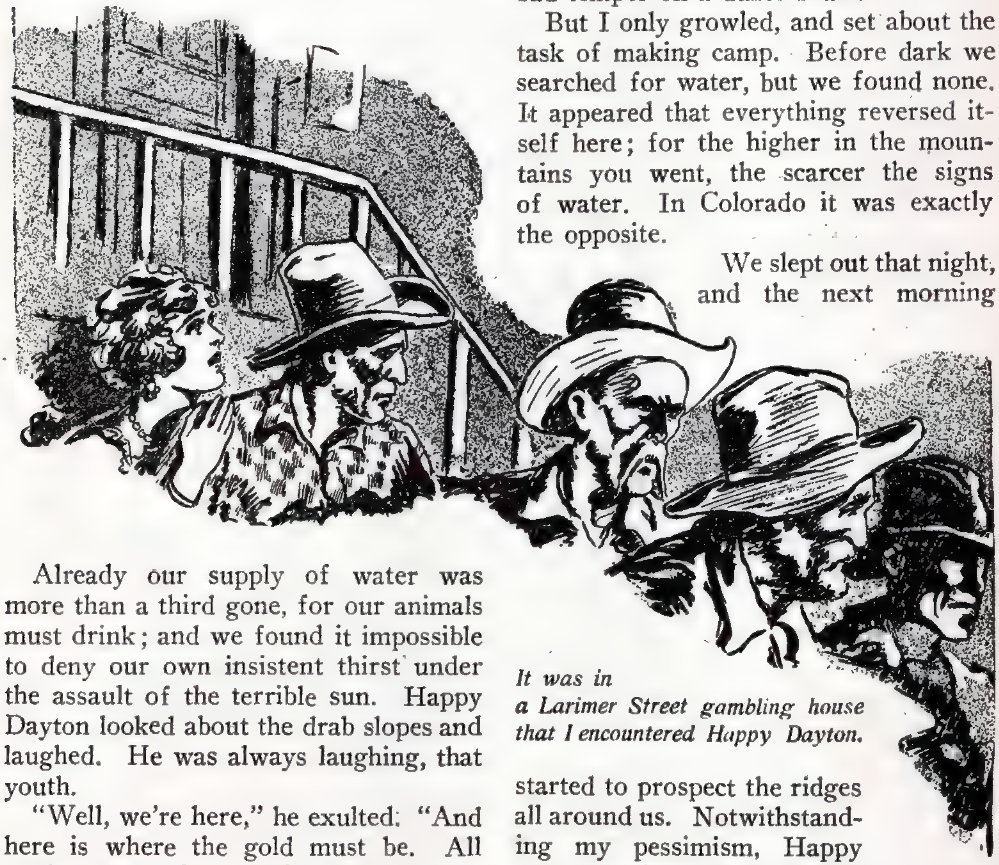
Travel across the mountains was a slow matter. And we spent virtually our entire capital, most of it gleaned from the little claim in Clear Creek Cañon, for such things as a couple of durable horses, several hardy little burros, and other necessities. We followed old Indian trails over the passes and through the valleys, sometimes bewildered as to our directions, but choosing our camping places with the utmost care. We saw no human beings for days on end until we had penetrated quite a distance into what is now the mystical land of New Mexico; and then the inhabitants were furtive, suspicious, and inclined to scurry out of our sight the instant they caught sight of us.

It was weeks before we got to the country we were seeking, and winter had come upon the land we had left behind us. There was no winter in Arizona, however. They call the desert we invaded the Mojave. And I recollect that it was a land forgotten by God, if ever any land was. It was a country of strange animals and stranger reptiles, of hard-bitten vegetation, of bewildering sand storms, of midnight snows and intense day-time heat, of cacti in numerous forms, of weird hills and mountains, of curiously brassy skies in midday, and of incredibly beautiful sunrises and sunsets. In short, it was a land of extraordinary contradictions and of constant danger to the uninitiated.

We fared forth into it with more boldness of action than of heart, for the desolation cannot be described or imagined. Our animals were constantly being startled and frightened by such things as road runners, queer birds that ran along the ground ahead of us with their abbreviated wings, incapable of carrying their bodies in the air, spread out as if to balance them; brightly colored lizards of every conceivable shape and form; and desert "sidewinders," or rattlesnakes with curved horns protruding from their flat heads, which struck without warning and then retreated like wobbly hoops.

We carried our water in porous bags, canteens, and small kegs. Strange to say, the water did not leak from the bags, and a curious system of evaporation kept it reasonably cool. Here and there, we ran across water pools in the hollows of brown rocks, which had caught some of the infrequent rains that fall, even in the desert. The power of the sun was such, however, that most of the precious fluid would be evaporated in a single day. And we knew little or nothing of the art of finding water by scraping away damp places in the sand.

Finally, we came to the foothills of the most extraordinary-looking mountains I had ever seen. Back in Colorado we knew mountains as giant hills, piled chain upon chain, and generous with green vegetation and water in the shape of springs, lakes, and tumbling streams. It was not so, however, with the mountains of the desert. These we found to be drab, dry, and brown; mere piles of igneous rock, divided by creek beds totally innocent of water, and with not even the cacti of the desert plains growing in their dusty valleys and gulches. Brown ghosts of mountains they were.



It was in a Larimer Street gambling house that I encountered Happy Dayton.

Already our supply of water was more than a third gone, for our animals must drink; and we found it impossible to deny our own insistent thirst under the assault of the terrible sun. Happy Dayton looked about the drab slopes and laughed. He was always laughing, that youth.

"Well, we're here," he exulted. "And here is where the gold must be. All we have to do is to get it and start back, Cole."

"Is that so?" I inquired sarcastically. The desert had not improved my temper any, and the unfailing good nature of my partner was irritating. I had grown morose and moody, the longer we were in the desolate country. And now that we had arrived at the place where Happy was so sure we would find the gold, I became more pessimistic than ever.

"Is that so?" I repeated, aiming a vicious kick at one of the burros, which had brushed my body in passing. "Well, all I have to say is, that I think we're a couple of fools for coming. It doesn't look like a gold country to me."

Happy laughed again. "Beg that poor little critter's pardon, Cole!" he commanded teasingly. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, to vent your bad temper on a dumb brute."

But I only growled, and set about the task of making camp. Before dark we searched for water, but we found none. It appeared that everything reversed itself here; for the higher in the mountains you went, the scarcer the signs of water. In Colorado it was exactly the opposite.

We slept out that night, and the next morning started to prospect the ridges all around us. Notwithstanding my pessimism, Happy went at it light-heartedly. We found nothing the first day, nor the second. And at the end of the first week, even he was ready to admit possible defeat; for a week in the desert is a long, long time. We started the second week somewhat heartened by a rainstorm, from which we managed to catch several gallons of water. But the extra supply was soon diminished again—and gold, apparently, as far off as ever.

And then, just as I was about to call off the venture and insist that we start back for "civilization" before it would be too late, Happy Dayton found gold!

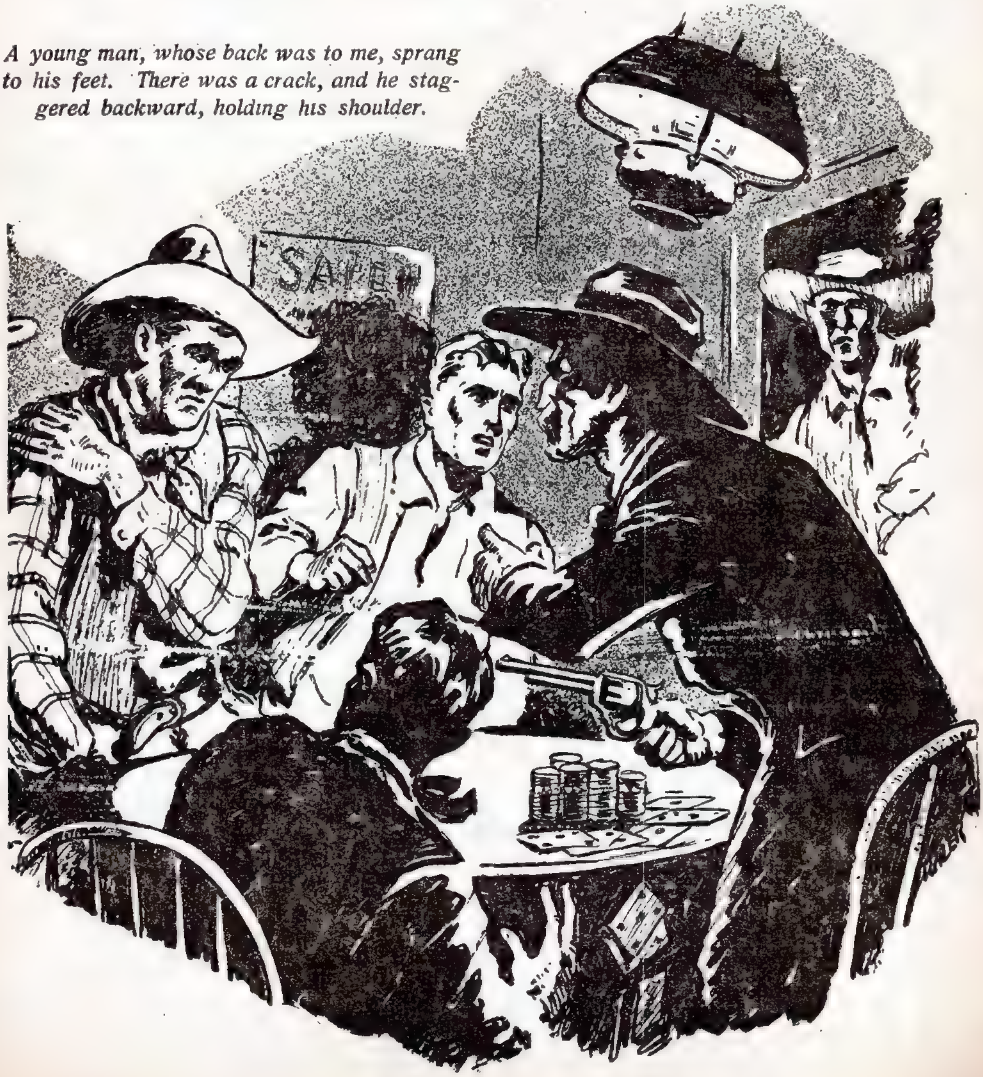
He heralded his discovery by a startled shout that rang through the dead gulches and penetrated to my ears. At the time we were working along a rocky slope about two hundred feet above the bottom. And my partner, following a ridge and pecking at it with his hammer, had knocked off a considerable chunk of the substance a moment before.

"Gold!" he yelled excitedly. "Gold!"

I scrambled along the steep slope to see. And when I arrived at the spot, there, sure enough, was the gold—yellow, gleaming in the late afternoon sun, and nestled in a pocket of the rocks as if it had dripped there from a giant cauldron.

"A pocket!" I exclaimed. "Pure metal!"

And so it was—pure, virgin gold, without a hint of extraneous substance in it. It was actually soft to the touch of the prospector's hammer. Happy's delight knew no bounds. He was clawing at the rock almost frantically.



A young man, whose back was to me, sprang to his feet. There was a crack, and he staggered backward, holding his shoulder.

But my reaction was different, for I was making a calculation as to the value of the strike. Pockets, I knew, usually occur in odd places, and sometimes with little relation to veins of gold-bearing quartz near by. We had come a long way, at considerable hardship and risk to say nothing of expense, to prospect for the precious metal in this killing desert. How large was this pocket? Or, in other words, how great was to be our reward?

It was growing dark, and we went back to our camp. Happy slept little, he confessed the next morning. Before daylight, he was up and preparing breakfast. And by the time the sun was showing itself, a glowing ball on the eastern horizon, we were back on the slope where we had left the gold.

That day we cleaned out the pocket. It amounted to a few miserable ounces only! And, look as we might, we could find no trace whatever of any more. When the fact had finally registered itself upon my consciousness, I cursed a steady stream. And Happy Dayton, for once, did not laugh. The blow had sobered him.

"We ought to be grateful at finding anything at all, Cole," he remarked presently. "It's better than nothing."

"Better than nothing!" I sneered. "Five or six ounces of gold, worth maybe a hundred dollars, and you call it better than nothing!"

"There's not less than thirty ounces here," he protested, weighing the canvas bag in his hand. "It's pure, and worth not less than six hundred dollars. That's better——"

"Bah!" I interrupted bitterly. "We've spent almost that much in outfitting ourselves, and for grub. By the time we get back, it'll be all gone."

"We'll go back and outfit ourselves over again, then come back. There is more gold here, I know. Only we can't stay here now to find it, on account of water. We must get more water."

"Come back if you like," I told him. "I'm through. No more grubbing in this part of the desert for me. There are easier ways to make money."

That evening we didn't speak as we ate our suppers. I was sullen, and Happy thoughtful, for the supply of water was alarmingly low. As we rolled in our respective blankets, the moon was rising, presaging a clear night. I couldn't sleep; but Happy, now that there was no excitement to keep him awake, was soon breathing steadily. I could hear the animals moving about restlessly and snorting occasionally.

We now had two burros and two horses. The latter might be relied upon to make a quick dash across, at least, a part of the desert, provided they were reasonably fortified with food and water. A burro, on the contrary, is never fast; but rather is dependable and durable, able to bear hardships that would kill a horse. I thought of all these things as I lay, wide eyed, staring at the silvery moon that rode across the sky.

I was in a desperate state of mind. A year's work for nothing; that was the way I sized it up. Other men were making fortunes at gold hunting. To be sure, I was young, but certainly growing no younger. And my ambition in life was to get wealth and power. I longed unspeakably for these two things. With six hundred dollars, clear, I might have the foundation for them. I *might*.

I thought of the youth sleeping peacefully on the other side of the fire, and swore savagely under my breath.

"I saved his life once," I muttered. "And he saved mine. What do we owe each other? Nothing!"

A distorted bit of reasoning, you will say, and I do not defend it. Perhaps, the hardships we had undergone had undermined my reason; I don't know. But the desert does some queer things to people. And solitude sometimes brings madness in its wake. I was really planning to rob my young partner, although up to this point I was hardly conscious of the fact. And robbery of my partner, to be successful, entailed taking from him the weapons he would naturally employ to protect his interests. The blood of outraged youth beats quickly.

I was out of my blanket before I knew clearly what I was about. My movements were stealthy and without sound. The boy was tired and did not stir. I went about my preparations methodically, my mind as clear as the moonlight that surrounded me. I was in the desert, where no quarter is sought or given among the denizens of the forsaken land. And the law of the survival of the fittest was the only law on the desert statute books.

It took me an hour to get ready for my journey. And my sleeping partner did not stir. I drove the four animals before me down the gulch and out into the foothills. Then, leaving them for a few minutes, I went back to look. Happy Dayton still slept! The little heap of supplies I had left lay a dozen feet from him. The sinister peace of the night was all about. I felt like a man in a dream; and I went back to the animals, my face grim as my thoughts, the bag of pure gold carried in the crook of my arm.

Had he aroused and come after me I would have shot him without hesitation. Of that I am sure. As it was, I had left him to die slowly, the death of thirst. He might live to come into the desert a little way in a futile effort to catch up with me; but he couldn't come far, for I had removed every vestige of water before departing. Why prolong his agony? I asked myself. The only reason why I didn't put a bullet in his head as he lay in his blanket was that I didn't want the crime of deliberate murder on my soul. At least, that is the excuse I made to myself.

I drove the animals as long as they could go without water, and then shot them, one by one. There was just enough of the precious fluid to last me if I used extreme care, for I found no water holes. In fact, I had looked for none. And I won through to the edge of the accursed place, in fair condition and with my bag of gold intact.

Had any one questioned me, I would have told him that my partner died in the desert. And that would have sufficed, for the desert guards its secrets well. Happy Dayton's body might, by this time, be reduced to a white skeleton, picked clean by coyote and vulture; it mattered little to me. I had not killed him.

I went to a city where I was not known. Since this confession is solely to relieve the terrific pressure that has been upon me for so many years, the name of the place is of no importance, any more than is my real name. With the money I had received in exchange for my gold—it was nearly a thousand dollars, instead of six hundred—I founded a small business. And I prospered!

To-day I am rich. I live in a mansion, and am waited on by servants who look like the retainers of royalty. When I ride down the street in my magnificent car, people turn to look. I am the cynosure of all eyes whenever I appear in public. And the newspapers are constantly running pictures of me.

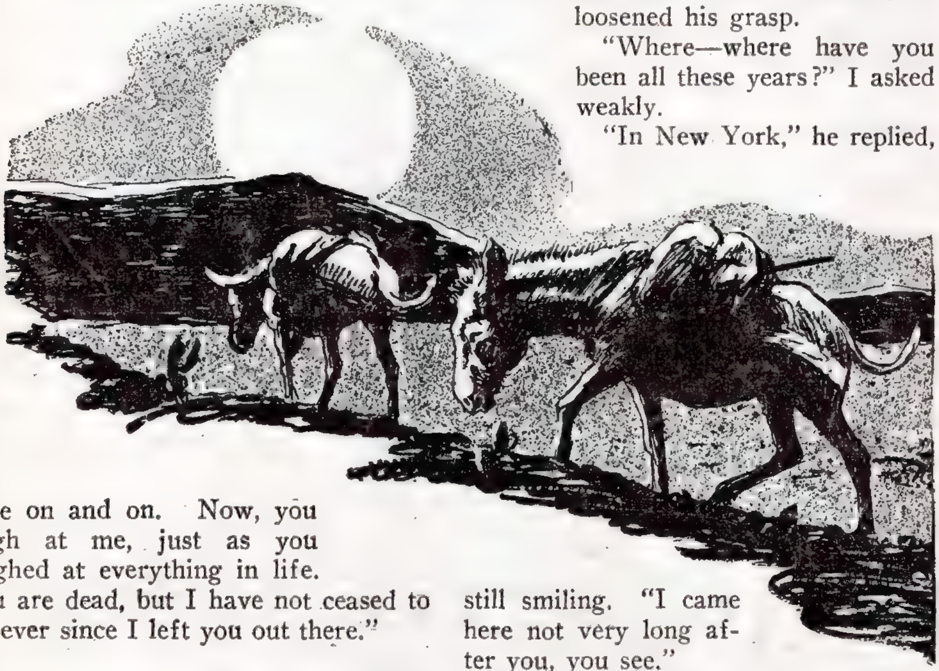
"The man who drinks from the golden cup," one imaginative reporter dubbed me; and the description sticks. I am the modern Midas, they say. Everything I touch turns to gold. I have never married; for "he travels fastest who travels alone," has been my motto. In fact, I have sold my soul for a mess of pottage; I have made my bed, and I have no other in which to lie.

Out in the desert I left the loyal friend who would have given his life for me. I left him to die knowing that the one whom he trusted had betrayed that trust, and to endure additional agony by reason of that knowledge.

And all for a chance to worship at the shrine of gold——

This evening I took a walk. I had been looking at Happy Dayton's picture, and cursing it. Yes, cursing it!

"You are dead," I told it. "You have slept peacefully all these years, out in the desert. And your agony was for just a little while, whereas mine has gone on and on. Now, you laugh at me, just as you laughed at everything in life. You are dead, but I have not ceased to die ever since I left you out there."



As I have said, I took a walk. It is summer, and the evening air is cooling to my old brow. Sometimes I try to walk away from all that reminds me of my riches. And this evening I tried it again.

At the corner where the park begins I met him, face to face, Happy Dayton! He, too, is older, and his hair is gray. But his eyes, blue as ever in the light of the arc lamp, looked straight into mine—and he smiled!

"Happy!" I gasped, before I could control myself.

"You know me, I see," he said quite naturally. There was a dignity about him that took account of the years that had had a maturing influence. He wore a soft straw hat, and a watch chain gleamed across his breast. I caught the sparkle of a diamond on one of his hands.

I felt that it would be useless to pretend ignorance, for my exclamation had betrayed me. Happy alive? I felt dizzy and staggered. His hand grasped my arm and steadied me. As soon as he saw that I had recovered, he loosened his grasp.

"Where—where have you been all these years?" I asked weakly.

"In New York," he replied, still smiling. "I came here not very long after you, you see."

"Then—you *knew?*"

He laughed amusedly. "Of course."

"But—but——" I floundered. I wanted to ask why he had made no move to avenge himself. And he seemed to know what was in my mind.

"At first I wanted to," he said. "But I was taken sick, you see. It was from my—struggle in the desert. When I recovered, my desire for revenge was gone."

"So you——" I began weakly.

"I have done well," he said simply, "as a merchant. Married and raised a fine family. I am not so rich as you"—he smiled again—"but I have enough to enjoy life on. And I have watched your rise with interest."

Watched my rise! A red haze swam before my eyes. The man whom I had thought of as dead in the desert, right here in New York, watching my rise—with interest! I seized him by the arm, but my grasp was weak.

"And all these years you have let me go on, suffering the tortures of the damned, when you could have put an end to them at any time!" I exclaimed. "When I thought I had—killed you?"

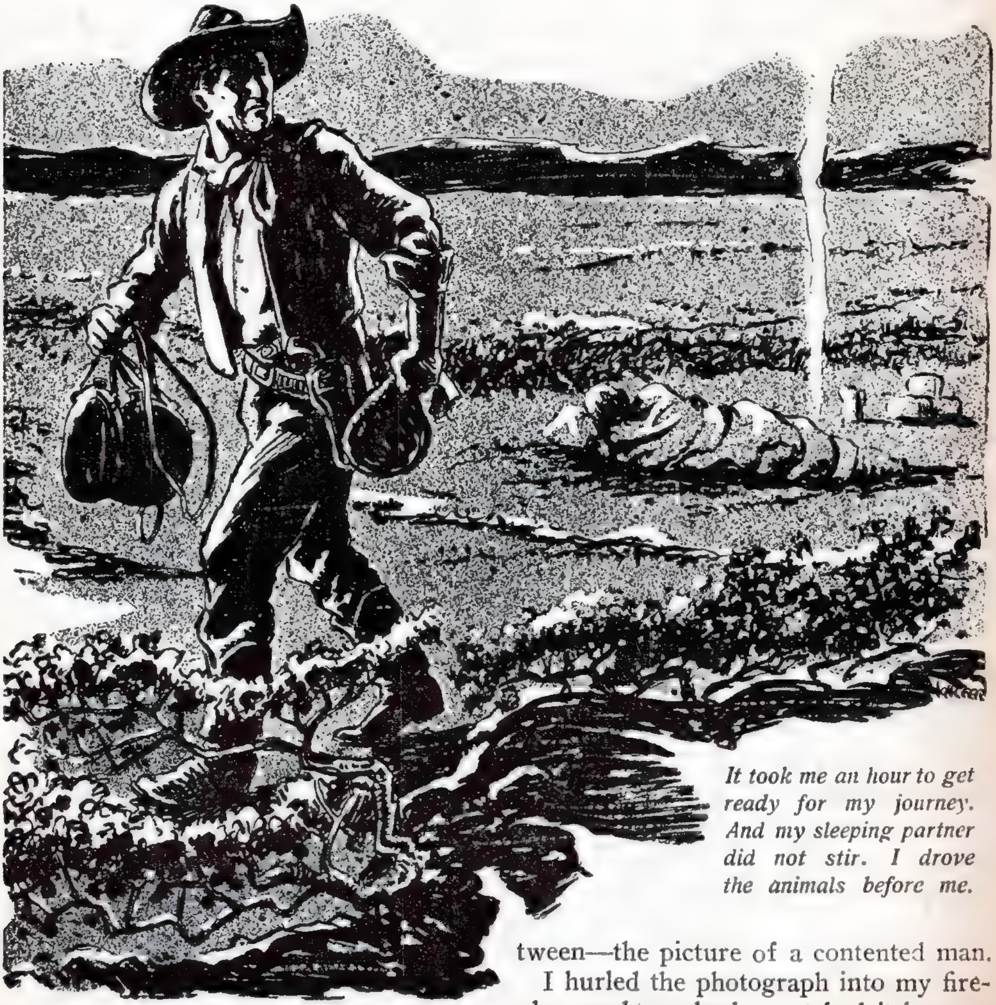
"No," he answered quietly. "The man you killed was yourself. You see that, don't you?" He had sobered. "I have had my revenge in watching you die, Cole, just as you thought you had left me to do. Don't you see?"

I got back to the house somehow, and I have just been looking at his picture again.

But the face of Happy Dayton has changed for me. The laugh in his blue eyes now carries a hint of unsuspected cruelty. And there are lines about his mouth which I never noticed before.

I looked about the room, and noted the familiar evidences of luxury. The picture of Happy Dayton as I had just seen him under the arc light came between—the picture of a contented man.

I hurled the photograph into my fireplace and, somberly, watched it burn.



It took me an hour to get ready for my journey. And my sleeping partner did not stir. I drove the animals before me.

© Edwin E. Smith

The process of "flanking" a calf to get him down for branding as here depicted, calls for exceptional skill.

The Out

Where to Find it - Conducted

A department of practical advice and infor acquainted with the great outdoors of the answered and many of general interest will circumstances of each individual case will be care of Far West Illustrated Magazine, 79

The Ranch

AMONG the letters of inquiry that reach me daily, those asking about the chances of becoming a cowboy out West still hold the lead by a goodly margin. Summer and winter, spring and fall, interest in this subject never seems to flag. To go out West and punch cattle is an ambition that comes to every red-blooded man at some time or other in his life. In all of us the deep-seated desire for adventure, for escape from routine is constantly urging us to fare forth and try our luck with fate. The West with its vast mountain areas, its forests, its cattle country, its deserts, and its fascinating traditions, is naturally the first place to suggest its possibilities. The cowboy and his horse have long been the leading romantic figures of Western life. They have been immortalized in fiction and verse, as well as in history, in moving-picture films, and in paintings, sculpture, and drawing. Is it any wonder that the West and its cowboy life appeal with compelling lure to the youth of America?

It is my personal belief that every man should spend some of his life adventuring, unless his circumstances are such that he will be neglecting his obligations by giving ear to the call of the camp and the trail. The lives of most young men have an interlude that can with advantage be devoted to seeing the world, rubbing elbows with all sorts of humans, roughing it out of doors, testing their manhood by contact with hardship and danger. Generally this interlude will come between the completion of their "book learnin'" and their buckling down to the serious business of carving out a career for themselves. To those who have such opportunity, I would say: By all means, go to it! You will come through the experience, a better man, a wiser man, a stronger man, with clearer vision, better perspective, less susceptibility to be misled by illusion.

A Statement from a Ranch

For instance, the young man who feels the urge to go out West and try his hand at getting on a ranch as a cow-

"Cutting out" a particular animal from the herd is another phase of a cowboy's work that taxes the skill of the man and his mount. © Erwin E. Smith

door West

How to Reach it

by John North

mation for those who desire to become better West. All letters of inquiry will be promptly be published. When advice is offered, the taken into consideration. Address John North, Seventh Avenue, New York.

Job Question

boy will be benefited if he actually takes a trip to the cattle country and makes the attempt to break into the game. The process may be disillusioning, but it will be instructive, and the experience will serve him well in later life.

He may be surprised and a little disappointed on reaching a town that has been given as the address of a ranch, to find that the ranch itself has its headquarters five, ten, fifteen or more miles away from the town. His next setback may come when he finds that the owner or foreman of the outfit is not in the least anxious to obtain his services. Regarding the prospect of the average tenderfoot getting a ranch job, the following statement issued by the S. M. S. Ranch, one of the big Texas outfits, is typical of the attitude of cattlemen toward the stranger from the outside seeking to become a cowboy. The statement, taken from a booklet issued by the ranch management, reads:

> We get a great many letters from men and boys all over the United States wanting a job on the S. M. S. Ranch; some on account of bad health, others from boys wanting a vacation job or lured by the "Wild West" idea; from earnest young men just out of agricultural colleges; many from people who seem to think that ranch life is a good deal of an outing, riding around on a good horse. There are, too, letters from people who know what work is and want to do it.
>
> Pressure has often been brought to bear upon the owners and the management to find room for those in ill health, or boys who want to learn the business, and it is often a real heartache to reply to these letters with the information that we employ only skilled help, and that only upon application in person, which means that our force is drawn from the surrounding country, and from men and boys brought up in cow work.
>
> Few succeed in cow work who have not grown up with it as boys. Each foreman hires his own men and is made responsible for them. The ranch discipline would be entirely destroyed if we sent to the foreman invalids, or men not qualified for the work, or novices. We are in deepest sympathy with people who are in bad health, but we cannot make a special provision for them, nor can we mix them with the workers without complications too serious to be considered.

There you have it right from the source, one of the leading Texas cattle

© Erwin E. Smith *The remuda, or saddle horse string of a big Texas cattle ranch is here shown crossing Duck Creek. The horse wrangler in charge of the remuda must know his job, or the ranch will be short of mounts.*

ranches operating to-day. There is just one loophole, one chance for the man who really has it in him to make good at cattle-ranch work, and that is to take the time to make himself a skilled cow hand and to be on the spot when the ranch has a vacancy for him. He has got to be able to compete on even terms with the men who have been brought up on the ranch from boyhood. No easy task, mind you, but it can be done.

A Tenderfoot's Obstacles

It requires highly specialized skill to perform the duties that fall to the cowboy at round-up time. A knowledge of the ways of cattle is an absolute necessity. The rounding up of strays from all over the range, the roping, "downing," and branding of calves, the cutting out from the herd of those animals selected for shipment to the market, all these tasks require a high degree of expertness in the saddle and in handling the rope and branding iron. This is acquired by practical experience gained by living where cattle are being raised and being constantly with the men who handle them. The would-be cowboy may manage this in various ways. He may be successful in getting some sort of odd job on a ranch—say chore boy, or kitchen helper, or, perhaps, if the business is a large one, he may be taken in some clerical capacity, keeping books or handling correspondence. This will give him a chance, in his spare time, to learn to ride, rope, brand, and acquire a certain degree of proficiency in other details of a cowboy's duties.

The making of a good cow-puncher is not a matter of weeks or months, but of years. If one of the newcomers to the game, therefore, should be lucky enough to break in, it is unlikely that he would have the knowledge and skill possessed by the old-timers. It would take several years of experience in the saddle handling cattle on the range to make him anything approaching a top hand.

Just suppose that the Western ranch owners were in the habit of putting tenderfeet to work in their outfits, where would these green hombres get off if confronted with some of the tasks shown in the accompanying photographs? What man without a good deal of experience in handling horses could manage the remuda that is shown fording or swimming a creek? And yet

The spring round-up on the Wyoming ranges enables cattlemen to make count of the increase of their herds by the birth of calves and to put the brand of the ranch on the new arrivals.

© Charles J. Belden

the job of horse wrangler usually falls to the youngest and least experienced member of the outfit. To the novice, the tasks of the horse wrangler would be colossal. It is not hard to imagine how the average youth with a yearning for a cowboy's life would act if confronted with the task of getting this band of horses together at least three times a day, of knowing them all by name, of being able to tell at a glance which horses were missing, to see that they are properly grazed and watered, and that none of them strays beyond recall.

Take any of the other tasks at which cowboys are depicted in the photographs. How would your tenderfoot, for instance, handle the calf that is in process of turning a somersault, and get him down for branding? In all probability, the tenderfoot would be pretty well damaged by the calf's flying feet, and the calf would go unbranded. Suppose he were told to "cut out" certain animals from a herd? Any one who knows the difficulty of this task can imagine the tenderfoot's predicament.

There is only one way to get a cowboy job, and that is to find the means of making yourself as proficient as the average capable cow hand, and to be on the spot in the vicinity of the cattle ranches when men are wanted.

Fewer Big Ranches

As I have pointed out before in these pages, there is plenty of elbow room out West to-day for the man who wants to find it. Likewise there are lots of cattle being raised, and there are cattle ranches and cowboys, all the way from the Mexican border to the Canadian boundary and beyond. Through northwestern Texas, the Panhandle region, there are some large cattle ranches still to be found. The town of Amarillo is an important center of the cattle industry; so is San Angelo. A stop-off at these towns and an investigating tour of the adjacent country would be a good experiment for any one looking for a chance to try his luck at breaking into the cow-punching game.

The experiment, as I have hinted in the beginning of this article, may carry with it something of disillusionment. I do not recommend any young man nowadays to go in for being a cowboy as a permanent career; but for those to

© Erwin E. Smith

A "stray man" with the S. M. S. outfit, a large Texas ranch that is still going strong.

whom adventure calls and who are footloose and can give rein to their desire to try their hands at the traditional basic industry of the West, I believe that the venture would be of decided benefit.

Every few weeks news reports record the passing of some large ranch property and its division into small farming and stock-raising tracts. Some large ranches still do business pretty much as in the old days, grazing their cattle on privately owned pastures of from twenty thousand to a hundred thousand acres, but these are gradually growing fewer. One of the most recent announced for subdivision was the famous Malibu Rancho, about twelve miles north of Santa Monica, California, on the shores of the Pacific, a tract some twenty miles in length and from half a mile to two and a half miles in width.

This was originally a Spanish land grant that had been kept intact since 1804. It was sold in 1870 for ten dollars an acre to the late Frederick Hastings Rindge, who had gone out to California in search of health, and according to press reports during the past year, it is to be divided into homesite tracts. Under ordinary conditions, the ranch would run five thousand cattle.

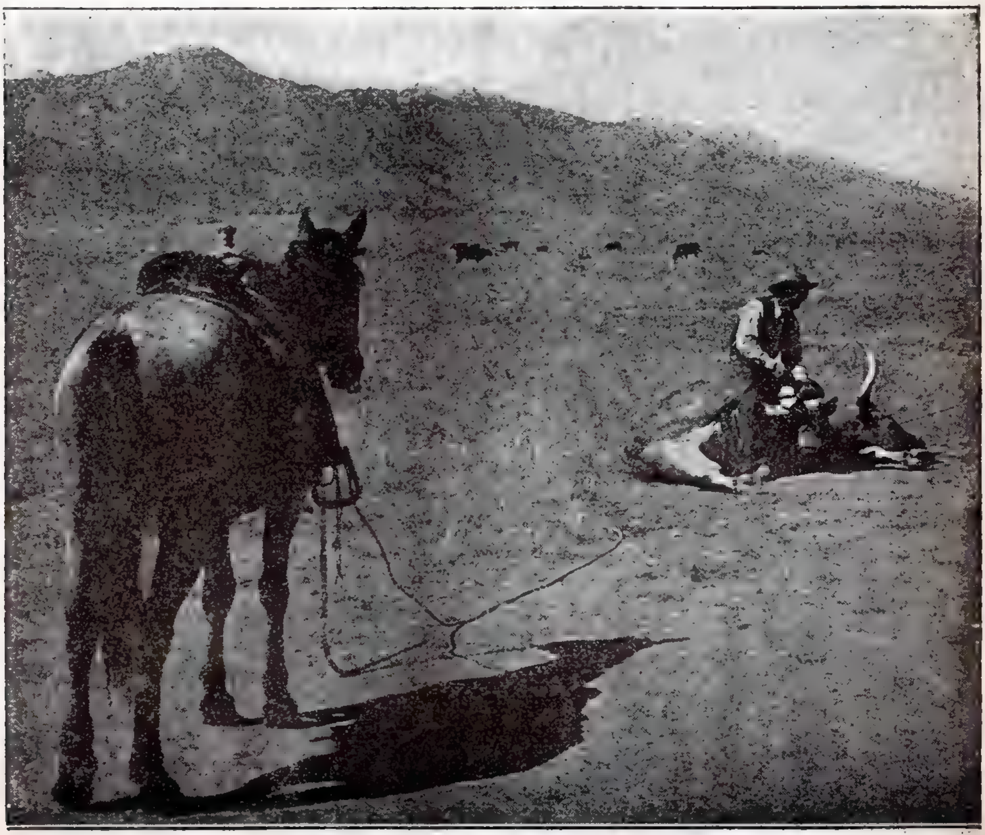
As long as cattle need grass and water—and there is no likelihood that they will ever cease to hanker for those two commodities—there will be cattle and cowboys on the Western ranges. Ranching methods may differ. To-day is the era of the small rancher, who grazes his herds in summer on the national forest ranges or on leased land. Yesterday was the day of the big rancher who had obtained his large holdings when land was easy to acquire. But the cowboy still holds his place as a romantic figure of the West, and it is quite likely that for a long time to come my mail will continue to bring numerous requests to obtain cowboy jobs for my readers and to give addresses of ranches where they may get a chance to obtain the coveted cow-puncher's berth. It's just the voice of youth seeking the golden trail of romance and adventure. You can't stop it.

Some of the tenderfeet who go out West to tackle the cow-puncher's job will fail; an occasional one may make good, but it will require time—a long time. It will take quite a few years, for instance, to learn how to do a stunt like the one pictured below—to rope and hog tie an outlaw steer. A large contributing factor to the accomplishment of this feat is the sturdy little cow horse standing in the foreground.

For all-around sagacity, these animals are hard to beat, and to gain the confidence of one of them, so as to get it to become as one in action with its rider, is something that a novice will not be able to do. A horse will not do its best for a man who, it feels instinctively, knows less of the business in hand than it knows itself. That's just plain everyday horse logic. But with an expert cow hand in the saddle, the things it can achieve in cutting out steers from a herd or in holding anything that is roped from its back almost surpass belief.

It takes the combination of a skilled hand with the reata, a good lariat, and a cow horse that can hold anything short of an express train to get a refractory outlaw steer down, out, and hog tied.

A good deal of the expertness of cowboys to-day is developed for purposes of exhibition at the various rodeos, and records in roping, hog tying, bulldogging, and other cowboy stunts are established at these affairs. An expert can do the feat above depicted—spilling a full-grown steer by roping, and then hog tying it—in the space of a few seconds.



Roping and hog tying an outlaw steer. © Erwin E. Smith

Animal Friends

Tell us about that pet of yours and send along a picture of it taken in action. Whether it is a domestic one or a wild one we'll be interested to hear about it, how it came to you, how you've trained it or any amusing or thrilling stories of it. All pictures used will be paid for. Address Animal Friends Department.

A LION! King of the Jungle, and for ages symbol of courage, boldness, ferocity. And here in our Animal Friends corner! But don't be frightened. He is only a baby lion, and he has an affectionate, loving disposition. We'll let Christopher Hemmery, 1339 Sunset Avenue, Pasadena, California, tell about him.

Leo, Stripe, and Mike.

"Out at the Gay Lion Farm, at El Monte, California, there is a triangular friendship that is a cause of joy to all concerned. Leo, the inquisitive baby lion, whose parents are spectacular stars in the motion-picture firmament; Stripe, a half-grown cat of humblest ancestry; and Mike, the calm-eyed trainer, make up the trio. Mike has charge of the education of dozens of young lion cubs that frolic in the large, high-fenced yards that cover the five-acre tract of the farm.

"Leo is an 'odd lion,' the only one of his litter. Disowned by his mother, he was adopted by the Gay family and brought up on a bottle, getting his ration of goats' milk and fresh-laid eggs on a regular three-hour schedule. It was in this early bottle era that he met the kitten, and the three-cornered friendship became complete.

"The kitten is fond of Mike and the little lion, but she is prone to stray off. Leo loves his two pals devotedly, and, although there are more than eighty lions in all stages of growth for him to play with, he is inclined to feel abused when either or both of his pals are out of his sight. When he finds himself completely deserted, he immediately announces the fact by loud lamentation, which changes to acrobatic ecstasy and throaty gurgles of happiness the instant his friends return. Then, his woes forgotten, he snuggles against the trainer, and, the cat securely in his grasp, he registers perfect bliss."

Strange as is this trio of friends, there

Buck as nursemaid.

A little bear from Red Pass, British Columbia.

are two other groups every bit as unusual and interesting. They are the animal friends of Mrs. Joseph Watson, of Yalesville, Connecticut. In one group, Buck, the dog, is posing as judge, while the plaintiff and defendant are Joey and Greyfriar, two cocks.

Then, with a lightning change of character, Buck becomes nursemaid, pushing Kitty about, while Greyfriar crows his approval of the proceeding.

From this scene of domestic tranquillity we turn to a little bruin who comes all the way from Red Pass, British Columbia, fifty-seven miles from even frontier civilization. He is the pet of S. A. Baine, who traps and hunts in this wild country.

Peter, an aristocrat.

Peter is the name of the wise-looking pussy who gazes down at us from the eminence of his fence post. There is just a slightly supercilious lift to his upper lip, for Peter is an aristocrat and feels the responsibility of living up to his traditions.

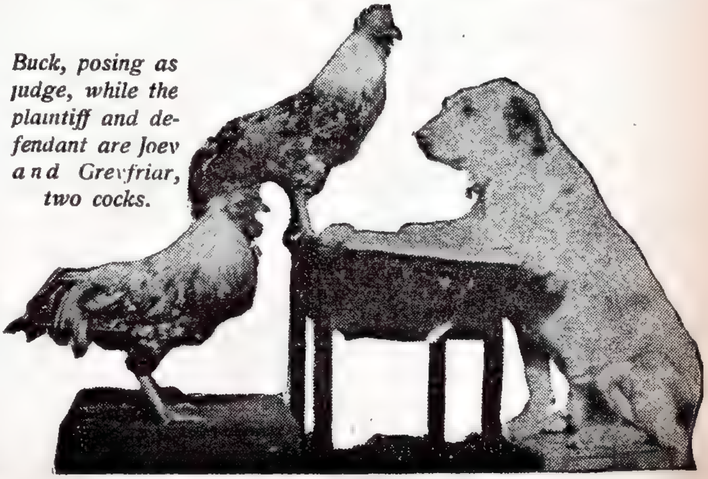
"He was a handsome big gray-and-white fellow with the long hair of a Persian or Angora," says his mistress, Miss Vinette Chalfant, of 3838 41st Street, East San Diego, California.

"This combination of long hair, and the two colors, gray and white, made him most unusual. Also, he was rather larger than the average cat, and, to tell the truth, we were just a little in awe of him.

"One little incident concerning Peter has always remained fresh in my mind. In our garden on the ranch was one of those annoying little pests known to all rural Californians, a gopher. Burrowing under the ground, they have a pleasing way of coming up in the middle of one's choicest flower bed. It's no unusual sight to see one's favorite plant topple over and disappear before one's very eyes.

"Peter was rather slow of movement for a cat, and it amused us to see him lay for that gopher, and when the gopher poked his nose above ground, Peter's belated spring invariably landed him on the spot where the gopher 'used to be!'

"One day when I had watched him miss the gopher I laughed, and Peter gave me the most withering look! A few days later Peter proudly dropped Mr. Gopher at my feet as though to say: 'There's your old gopher! S'pose you thought I couldn't get him!' "



Buck, posing as judge, while the plaintiff and defendant are Joey and Greyfriar, two cocks.

The Home Ranch

IT'S easy to see that a magazine without a lot of real friendly friends can't get very far. Too, there has got to be enthusiasm among these friends, lots of it, or a publication, or anything else, for that matter, will never really get its head above water.

It's the same way with everything. Ask any woman or man, any girl or boy, that amounts to anything, and he will say, take all my worldly goods away if you must, but don't take away my friends. Now, there is only one way to make friends, and, what is a whole lot more important, keep 'em, and that's to try your level best to do what's right by them. Whether you want to make personal friends or business friends, and hold 'em, you've got to come just as everlastingly near doing what's right as it's in you to do. Well, we've made friends, and we're proud of it and of them. And we're going to make a lot more friends, if tryin' for all we're worth will do it.

But when you are tryin' to make a lot of friends for a magazine, it's just simply impossible, unless the folks that buy the publication help you by writin' in and sayin' how they like what you're givin' them for their money. It isn't like a feller keepin' a store, or doin' a stunt on the stage, anything where he comes directly in contact with the people he wants to give his finest service, the best run for their money it's in him to give. An editor doesn't see his folks. They are scattered all over the world. Yes, literally, all over the world. We, ourselves, are daily astounded at learning of some new, far-distant, isolated place into which your magazine has penetrated and made more friends.

So, don't forget, will you, that we're sitting here, all alone, so far as hearing a single one of your voices, feeling a single one of your hearty handclasps, or seeing a single smiling, encouraging face. To hold us to you, help us mold and constantly improve this magazine so that it will be more and more to your liking, you must send us lots and lots of letters of constructive criticism, and you must keep on sending them. Many letters have come from you, and more are coming every day, and we thank you again and again for each and every one.

Here's one letter right now, from G. L. Chester, of Visalia, California. Mr. Chester has a compliment for one of our authors, Mr. H. C. Wire.

Dear Editor: In the November and December, 1926, issues of your magazine you have George Sontag's story to Mr. Wire of the Evans and Sontag robberies in California. I wish to compliment Mr. Sontag for the truthfulness with which he has related the story. It contains but a few mistakes, and most of these are of minor character, such as the mistake in the name of the sheriff, and the statement that Deputy Witty was killed.

"All earlier printed accounts that have come within my notice have been not only erroneous in fact but misleading in intent, while in this the intent is apparent to tell the actual story. An omission, probably justified in as much as some of the people still live, appears when it is stated that the earlier work was done by Chris and John alone.

"The part of the story relating to the 'shadow' from the East clear to the coast is the first credit I have seen given for a most remarkable piece of detective work. The man who performed it was but thirty or forty hours behind when the criminals hit the coast, and it was his tip to the officers that caused the arrest of George and the attempt to arrest Chris and John at the house. His story was so convincing that these arrests were attempted, against the conviction of the local sheriff."

To Mrs. Billy Dohlman, of Oakland, California, we are indebted for the picture of Shoo Fly.

"The boys," says Mrs. Dohlman, "are trying to find out what there is in this bronc. They found plenty, for Shoo Fly proved good enough to be used in several round-ups for the finals. The picture was taken near Missoula, Montana."

Shoo Fly showing what's in him.

Mail *for* You In Our Post Office

Ask Jack Bassett, Postmaster

If you'd like to swap yarns with other congenial souls, if you have interesting adventures to relate, or information you'd like to give about your part of the country, or ask about some other part, drop a letter in our post office. Letters will be forwarded only between those of the same sex, and no business will be transacted through the department. Send pictures and letters to Jack Bassett, Postmaster. Pictures accepted for publication will be paid for.

NOW, folks, don't fail to visit the post office durin' holiday time. It's a season that comes only once a year, and there's no other like it. There's a spirit that pervades the old mail shack at this time of year that makes everybody's heart sing, and friendships that are formed during this season will ne'er be forgot. Drop around, folks, and exchange greetings with my purp dog and me, and say "Merry Christmas," and "A Happy New Year," to all your old and new-found friends. To those from afar who can't break the trail to visit us, we want to say right here and now that you-all have our best wishes.

"A Merry Christmas" to all. To all "A Happy New Year."

Glissading on Mount Hood.

How about taking a glissade right down into our camp, Harry?

Elliott Glacier on the northeast side of Mt. Hood.

"DEAR MR. BASSETT: I'd like to tell your many friends in the post office what fun a feller gets out of glissading. Yes, it's true that he gets something besides fun—he finds himself in the middle of a whole bundle of wet clothing, but this is soon dried in the brisk mountain air.

"I'm a-goin' to show you a little snap of what glissading is like on Mount Hood. This slope, which looks so gentle, is in reality so steep that it is fully as acute as the pitch of a roof, and the mountain climbers, dressed in khaki, had only to sit down in the snow, use their alpenstocks as rudders, and they would descend quite fast enough to suit even the most hardy.

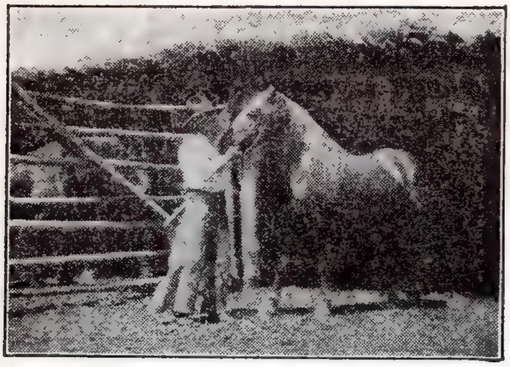
"This other little snapshot I'm sending along shows Elliott Glacier on the northeast side of Mount Hood, where it slopes down into Hood River Valley. This accumulation of the snows of many generations lies in a vast depression on a slope of the mountain.

"H. A. FARNHAM.

"Care of Mail for You."

We sure think that Santa has been visiting this little girl ahead of time.

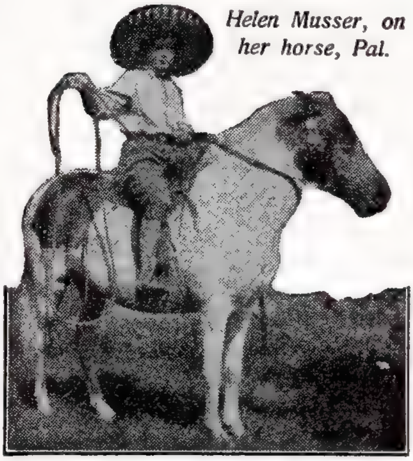
"DEAR MR. BASSETT: Just a few lines about our-



Gene Peters and his Sunshine hoss.

selves in case there is any one dropping around your post office who would care at any time to write us a word or two.

"We, Mrs. Musser, our daughter Helen, and myself live on a small farm about four miles north of Rutland, Ohio. We are all fond of riding. We have three horses, and not long ago we bought a pony for our daughter to ride. Helen calls her Pal, and takes a great deal of pleasure riding the little mare. Helen is nine, and has been used to riding since she was six years old. We live a mile and a quarter from the school, and Helen has ridden horseback to and from her studies since she was a very little girl.



Helen Musser, on her horse, Pal.

"Would you-all like to hear about Helen's Pal? Perhaps the youngsters would like to know what the pony is like. Pal weighs five hundred and fifty pounds, has pink skin, with white and sorrel spots, and has what we call 'glass eyes.' The saddle is just like a heavy stock saddle and weighs nineteen pounds. Helen is sure proud of that saddle! We got it in Nebraska.

Harry Benson, of North Dakota.

"Now, a word about myself. I'm thirty-one, served in the World War, and had three years of military service before that. I farm in the summertime, and during the winter months I have a small harness shop and do repair work. One of my hobbies is rope spinning, and I've become quite expert at it.

"We've traveled a bit through the West, and any one interested in hearing more of our yarn, just come ahead.

"W. D. Musser.
"Rutland, Ohio."

Take a pasear over our way, Peters.

"Dear Mr. Bassett: I've been working for the H A Bar outfit and the Backward F Bar outfit in the Big Horn Mountains, in Buffalo, Wyoming. One of the things I like about that section of the country is the informal rodeo we hombres stage when the end of the week comes. All the ranches get together on this. We ride broncs, rope mavericks, and have a generally good time. I do some fancy roping myself.

"Take a squint at the snap that shows the cowboy hombre in the corral. That hoss is Sunshine, my pal. I bought him at a horse sale in Buffalo for fifteen dollars, and he sure was one hard bronc to break. He had a bagful of bad tricks, but it wasn't long before I made a good cow pony out of him.

"I was cutting cattle one day in the stockyards when Sunshine took a notion and blew up on me. As I wasn't expecting anything like this, he sure succeeded in giving me the air, and I got my arm put out of place at the same time. I had my arm in a sling for four days.

"Would appreciate hearing from a lot of you folks.

"Gene Peters.
"Care of Mail for You."

Harry Benson, who lives on a farm in Stutsman County, North Dakota, hasn't much to say, but he gives us a pretty good idea of himself, along with his saddle pony, in the snapshot that he sends. Take a squint at it, you hombres of the saddle, and then write to Benson, at Woodworth, North Dakota, and tell him what you think of him.

You as like to call yourselves hunters, please step forward.

"Dear Mr. Bassett: Are there any cat and coon hunters in your outfit? If so, would like mighty well to hear from them. I'm a stranger in your parts, and want to make myself acquainted.

"My pard and I have four mighty good hounds, and we hunt the year round. Any one interested in hearing our yarns?

"A Friend Down Texas Way.
"Care of Mail for You."

Glad to see yuh, boys.

"Dear Mr. Bassett: I'm a boy sixteen years of age, and have been practicing trick roping ever since I knew what it was. I can do about twenty-five stunts, using from one to three ropes. Now, what I want to do some time, is to be able to perform at rodeos. I want to do trick riding and fancy roping stunts. Will the hombres who can do this stuff drop me a line and give me some hints and advice? All letters from the ranches will be greatly appreciated.

"Wheeler (Newt.) Carter.
"819 North 7th Street,
"Fredonia, Kansas."

L. Allen Colburn, Jr., of Abington, Connecticut, would like to correspond with a "cowboy about nineteen years of age, if they make 'em that young." He can tell of Connecticut's historical landmarks, and writes an interesting letter.

"I am a Detroit boy who would appreciate correspondence with fellows in the Western States," writes H. J. Landis, 5058 23d Street, Detroit, Michigan. Landis is seventeen.

"Howdy, Folks: This is from a couple in Ohio, who wish to become acquainted with those who are fond of animals and the outdoors. We take a great many snapshots, and are more than willing to exchange them for snaps of other States.

"The country about Akron has some very lovely scenery. Ohio has more lakes than any other State that I know of. Within a radius of fifty miles of Akron are Turkeyfoot Lake, Wingfoot, Summit, Springfield, Sandy, Chippewa, East Reservoir, Crystal, Brady's Long, and many others. They are nearly all full of fish; Wingfoot, especially, is noted.

"We have a baby girl nineteen months old—our only pet. My husband is thirty, and I am twenty-one. Won't some of the young folks write to us?

"Mr. and Mrs. Arnold M. Davis.
"514 Brown Street, Akron, Ohio."

"I should love to receive letters from you who know the West," says Miss T. Orlean Dudley, of Morgan Street, Roanoke, Alabama.

To Men Getting Bald I Say!

No matter how fast your hair is falling out—no matter how much of it is already gone—I make this amazing guarantee! I'll end dandruff—stop falling hair—grow new hair in 30 days—or you don't pay me a cent! No strings attached! No "Ifs", "Ands" or "Maybes"! New hair or no pay! And you are the sole judge!

By ALOIS MERKE

Founder of the Merke Institute, 5th Avenue, New York

SAVE yourself from baldness! Stop falling hair! Grasp this "no risk" offer to grow new healthy hair in 30 days!

Here's My Contract!

If your hair is rapidly falling out—if your appearance is spoiled by approaching baldness—if you have tried countless expensive hair treatments unsuccessfully—it makes no difference. My contract stands! I'll grow new hair in thirty days—or the trial costs you NOTHING.

Here's My Secret

Years of training and research and day after day experience in treating thousands of cases of loss of hair at the famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, N. Y., have taught me many valuable facts about the hair—and this, the most amazing of all—that in most cases of baldness the hair roots are not dead, but merely *dormant*—asleep!

You're wasting your time — you're throwing away money—when you try to reach these dormant roots with ordinary hair tonics, oils, massages and salves. For such measures treat only the *surface skin* and *never even get* to the roots, the *real* source of trouble. How could they ever *possibly* grow new hair?

EVIDENCE!

Hair Coming Back

"Having used your Thermocap Treatment for 30 days, I find a new growth of hair coming back on bald spot. It is growing in very fine. The Thermocap is a Treatment that everyone who is losing his hair should buy."

G. H. P., Portland, Me.

Dandruff Leaves Entirely

"I want to tell you how wonderful your treatment is. The first week my dandruff left entirely, and by the third week a new growth of hair could be seen all over my head."

Mrs. H. S.,
Port Angeles, Wash.

Partly Bald for 10 Years

"I have been partly bald for the last 10 years and have used your treatment only four weeks to date, but I can already see a new crop of hair coming in."

J. A. K.
Anderson, Ind.

My Method Reaches the Roots

It's no use trying to make a tree grow by rubbing "growing fluid" on the bark. You *must* get to the roots!

And that's just why my scientific treatment is so tremendously beneficial! It penetrates *below* the surface of the scalp. It quickly reaches the *cause* of the trouble—the dormant, starving hair roots. It awakens them. Hair begins to sprout again. It takes on new life and color. It becomes stronger and thicker. And in a suprisingly short time—sooner than you ever imagined possible—you have a new healthy growth of hair—OR I PAY ALL COSTS OF THE TREATMENT MYSELF.

And best of all, my system is so simple that it can be used in any home where there is electricity without the slightest discomfort—*and for just a few cents a day!*

New Hair or No Cost!

Thousands claim seeming miracles for my treatment. I don't. I admit some cases of loss of hair are hopeless. Only remember this—these cases are so very rare and so many hundreds of others have regained luxuriant hair through my method, that I am willing to let you try it for 30 days—AT MY RISK!

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Free Booklet Tells All

The very fact that you have read this announcement shows that you are anxious about the condition of your hair. So why not investigate? Find out for yourself. If you will merely fill in and mail the coupon I will gladly send you without cost or obligation a wonderfully interesting booklet which describes in detail my successful system, which is growing new hair for thousands all over the country. In addition it tells all about my iron-clad guarantee, which enables you to take my treatment without a penny's risk. Clip and mail the coupon today.

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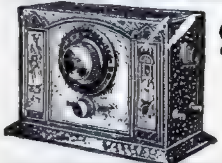

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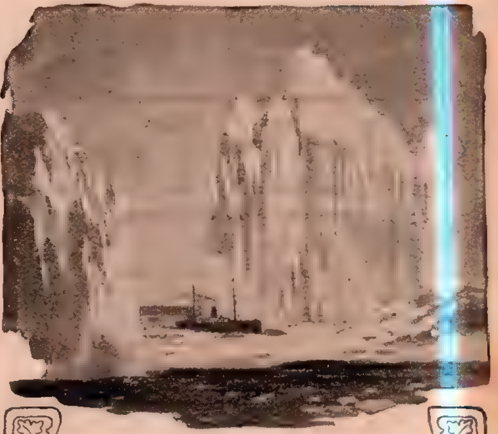

With the "Trouble-Shooters" of the North Atlantic

ICE-BERGS—towering, ponderous, *deadly* mountains of ice drift southward from the ice fields of the Arctic into the traffic lane of trans-Atlantic steamers.

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If You Were Dying To-Night

and I offered something that would give you ten years more to live, would you take it? You'd grab it. Well, fellows, I've got it, but don't wait till you're dying or it won't do you a bit of good. It will then be too late. Right now is the time. Tomorrow, or any day, some disease will get you and if you have not equipped yourself to fight it off, you're gone. I don't claim to cure disease. I am not a medical doctor, but I'll put you in such condition that the doctor will starve to death waiting for you to take sick. Can you imagine a mosquito trying to bite a brick wall? A fine chance.

A Re-Built Man

I like to get the weak ones. I delight in getting hold of a man who has been turned down as hopeless by others. It's easy enough to finish a task that's more than half done. But give me the weak, sickly chap and watch him grow stronger. That's what I like. It's fun to me because I know I can do it and I like to give the other fellow the laugh. I don't simply give you a veneer of muscle that looks good to others. I work on you both inside and out. I not only put big, massive arms and legs on you, but I build up those inner muscles that surround your vital organs. The kind that give you real pep and energy, the kind that fire you with ambition and the courage to tackle anything set before you.

All I Ask Is Ninety Days

Who says it takes years to get in shape? Show me the man who makes any such claims and I'll make him eat his words. I'll put one full inch on your arm in just 30 days. Yes, and two full inches on your chest in the same length of time. Meanwhile, I'm putting life and pep into your old back-bone. And from then on, just watch 'em grow. At the end of thirty days you won't know yourself. Your whole body will take on an entirely different appearance. But you're only started. Now come the real works. I've only built my foundation. I want just 60 days more (90 in all) and you'll make those friends of yours, who think they're strong, look like something the cat dragged in.

A Real Man

When I'm through with you, you're a real man. The kind that can prove it. You will be able to do things you had thought impossible. And the beauty of it is you keep on going. Your deep, full chest breathes in rich, pure air, stimulating your blood and making you just bubble over with vim and vitality. Your huge square shoulders and your massive muscular arms have that craving for exercise of a regular he-man. You have the flash to your eye and the pep to your step that will make you admired and sought after, both in business and social world.

This is no idle prattle, fellows. If you doubt me, make me prove it. Go ahead. I like it. I have already done this for thousands of others and my records are unchallenged. What I have done for them, I will do for you. Come, then, for time flies and every day counts. Let this very day be the beginning of new life to you.

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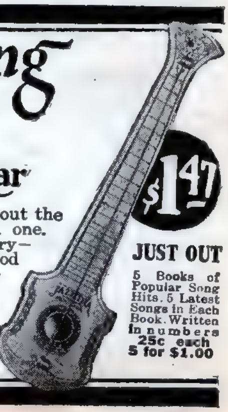

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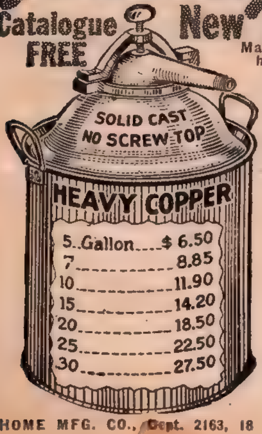

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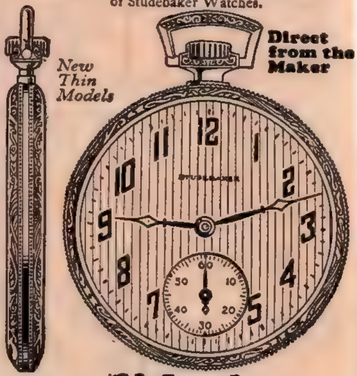

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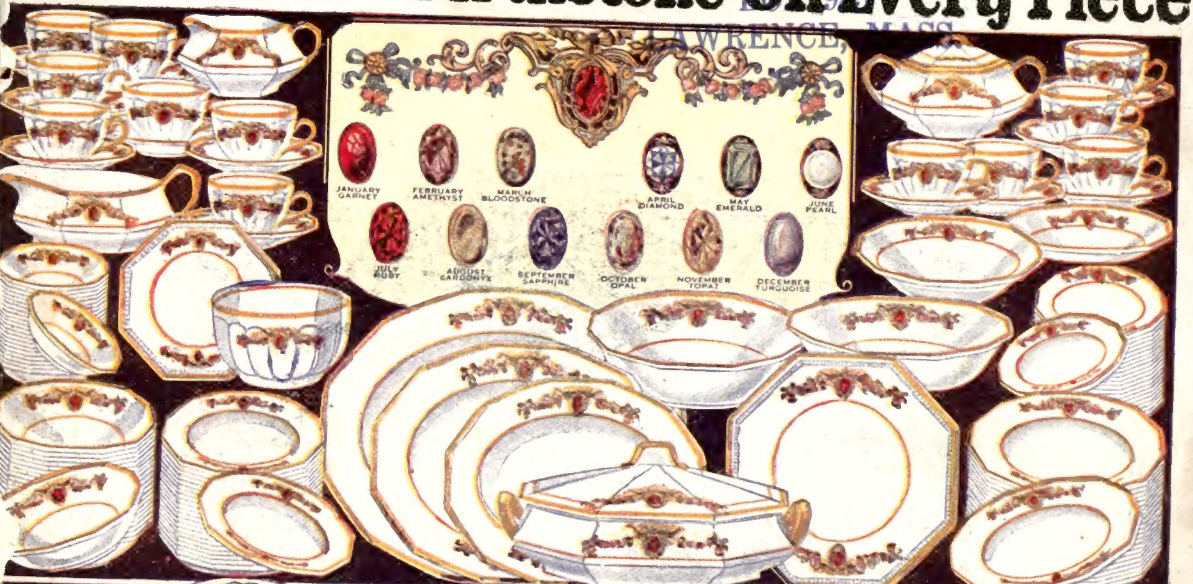

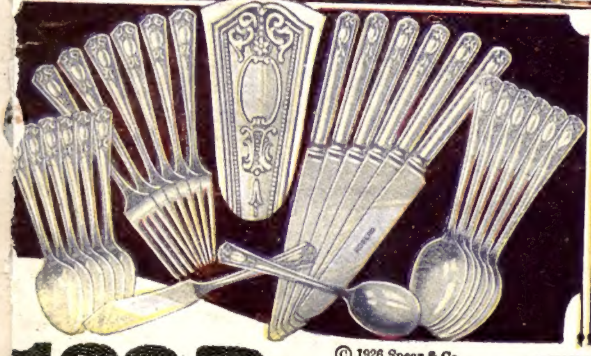

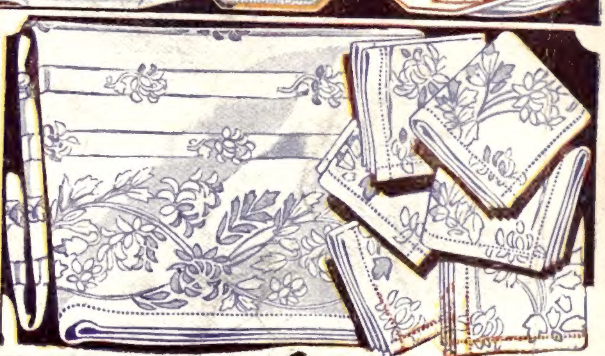

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- 12–7¾ in. Soup Plates
- 12–5½ in. Dessert Dishes
- 12 Cups
- 12 Saucers
- 1–14 in. Large Platter
- 1 Medium Size Platter
- 1 Small Platter
- 1 Covered Vegetable Dish (2 Pieces)
- 1–9½ in. Round Open Vegetable Dish
- 1 Sugar Bowl (2 Pieces)
- 1 Cream Pitcher
- 1 Sauce Boat
- 1 Oblong Open Vegetable Dish
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Knives have French Shaped Blades

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